



8

Birth of Christ

Key Theme

- Jesus is God in the flesh.

Key Passages

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

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe how Jesus was born.
- Explain why Jesus's birth was surprising.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, "Can God demonstrate humility?"

Students will review the memory verse by completing the Memory Verse Crossword and reciting the verse to a friend or to the class.

- Memory Verse Crossword for each student from the Resource DVD-ROM



Studying God's Word

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.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.



Activity: Before and After

Students will identify from memory the events immediately surrounding the birth of Jesus and compare them to the account recorded in Scripture.

- Before and After worksheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student
- Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages listed above along with this 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 THE THRONE

Dear Jesus, you are the Word made flesh, and I glorify your name. Some people say you were born to die. And while that is true, I also see that you were born to live, so that we, too, could live. Your life, from the very first moment, was an example for us. My desire is to be like you—humble and obedient. Thank you for the grace, truth, and clarity of the gospel. Please move in the hearts of the students in my class to see you for who you really are. Reveal the truth of your Word to them that they may one day come to humble repentance and faith and become new creations in Christ.

Review

Last week we talked about how the births of two people from the Bible were announced.

? Who were the two people whose births were announced by the angel Gabriel? *John the Baptist and Jesus the Messiah.*

God had shown Himself faithful in fulfilling the promises He had made through many prophets, hundreds of years before they would come to pass. In this fulfillment, God the Father had sent God the Son to the earth to be born of a virgin that He might

redeem mankind through His life, death, and Resurrection.

Further, the fulfilled prophecies help to encourage us as Christians to trust the Bible, and they provide unbelievers with a clear example of God's omniscience and sovereignty.

Today we are going to move forward a few months to the birth of Jesus. But let's start with a short activity.



Before and After

MATERIALS

- Before and After worksheet for each student
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

We often remember details a bit out of order or insert ideas we have heard in sermons or seen in movies.

Pass out the Before and After worksheet to each student.

On this worksheet is an activity titled Before and After. I want you to take a few minutes, without peeking at a neighbor

or your Bible, and write down as many details of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus as you can remember. Think about what happened in the 24 hours prior to the birth and the 24 hours after the birth, and write those in the spaces provided.

Have the students record their thoughts.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Now, let's read through the account, and then we will come back and see how well you did.





Studying God's Word

► Write on the board, "Can God demonstrate humility?"

READ THE WORD

Let's read Luke 2:1–20 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Luke 2:1–20

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **When did these events take place?** *While Quirinius was governor of Syria.*
- ? **What event took Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem?** *There was a census.*
- ? **What other name is given for Bethlehem?** *The city of David.*
- ? **Why, exactly, did Joseph go to Bethlehem?** *He was of the line of David, so he registered in the city of David.*
- ? **How were Joseph and Mary related?** *They were betrothed to be married.*
- ? **What condition was Mary in?** *She was pregnant.*
- ? **When did she have the baby?** *Verse 6 says that she came to full term "while they were there" in Bethlehem.*
- ? **How was the Baby treated when He was born?** *He was wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger.*
- ? **Why was Jesus placed in a manger?** *There was no room for them in the "inn."*
- ? **What was the name of the innkeeper who turned them away?** *There is no innkeeper mentioned in the text.*
- ? **How did the shepherds hear about the birth of Jesus?** *An angel appeared to them.*
- ? **How did the shepherds respond?** *They were afraid because of the glory of the Lord.*
- ? **What did the angel tell them?** *The angel brought a message of glad tidings—the Savior, Christ the Lord, had been born in the city of David.*
- ? **How would the shepherds know the Savior child?** *He would be wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger in Bethlehem.*
- ? **What did the angels who appeared sing?** *While we often think, and sing, that the angels sang, the text says they were "saying" not singing. They said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"*
- ? **What did the shepherds do after the angels left?** *They went to Bethlehem and found the family, just as the angel had said.*
- ? **What did the shepherds do after they had visited the family?** *They spread the news the angel had given them.*

- ? **How did the people respond?** *They marveled at the news.*
- ? **How did the shepherds behave as they returned to their flocks?** *They were glorifying and praising God for the good news they had received.*

Discover the Truth

Let's compare what we just read with your Before and After notes. I would be willing to bet that you have a few errors on your sheets, not necessarily because you have bad memories, but because we often blend what we have seen in movies, what we have sung in Christmas carols, or what roles we have played in Christmas pageants.

- ? **In the Before section, what events did you have listed?** *Discuss the answers and connect them to the text just discussed. Have the students note any errors on the Before and After timeline.*

Possible errors:

It is likely that some will have Joseph and Mary arriving the night of the delivery and Mary riding on a donkey, but the text clearly states that they had already been there when the days were fulfilled (verse 6).

Some will mention the inn or the innkeeper, but there is no innkeeper in the Bible. In fact, it is very unlikely that there was an inn in Bethlehem. The word used is not the word used in other places to refer to an inn, but it is kataluma. This is the word used for the upper room where Jesus had the Passover dinner before His Crucifixion. Young's Literal Translation translates the phrase "because there was not for them a place in the guest-chamber." Many homes of the time would have had an upper guest room, but with many people in town for the census, the room was occupied. There was also likely a stable in the lower level of many homes where animals were brought in for the evening. Mary likely delivered in this area, and a manger lined with fresh straw provided a suitable cradle, under the conditions.

- ? **In the After section, what events did you write down?** *Discuss the answers and connect them to the text just discussed. Have the students note any errors on the Before and After timeline.*

Possible errors:

Many times the angels are presented as singing before the shepherds, but the text actually says they were "saying." Since angels are described as singing in other passages, this is not an unreasonable connection.

Another common error is to present the wise men arriving on the night of the birth. However, this is not indicated in the text, and it was likely some time later (up to two years) before they arrived. This point will be addressed further in Lesson 9.

- ? **What attributes of God do we see as we read this account and consider how Joseph and Mary came to be in Bethlehem?** *Sovereignty and wisdom, among others.*

- ? **What prophecy was fulfilled through the birth occurring in Bethlehem?** *Micah had prophesied that the Ruler in Israel would be born in Bethlehem of Judah. Have someone read the verse aloud.*

SOVEREIGN

WISE

Micah 5:2

God brought all of these things to pass in a way that was not very impressive looking in from the outside. Jesus was born in an unassuming town and laid in a feeding trough. Rather than a majestic parade of dignitaries lining up to offer their allegiance to the babe, God sent shepherds to announce the birth to the people of the town. Shepherds! These men would have been part of the lower class of society—the very opposite of what we might expect for the birth of the King of kings. No doubt, this was a humble way for the God of the universe to step into His creation.



READ THE WORD

Now that we have read about the birth of Jesus, let's focus a little more on what exactly happened at His birth by reading John 1:1–14. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

John 1:1–14

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **What do we learn about the Word in the first two verses of John 1?** *The Word was with God in the beginning, the Word was God, and the Word existed in the beginning.*
- ? **What does verse 3 tell us about the activity of the Word?** *The Word created everything.*
- ? **Why does verse 3 restate the same idea twice?** *It is done for emphasis and to make sure that it is absolutely clear that the Word is the Creator. It is stated in both the positive and negative senses to make sure there is no confusion or doubt.*
- ? **What pronoun is used to refer to the Word?** *Him; this is to indicate that the Word is a person.*
- ? **What other name for the Word is given in verse 4 and following?** *He is the Light.*
- ? **Who is the Light distinguished from in verse 6?** *John the Baptist, the one who came to prepare the way of the Lord, as we discussed in the last lesson.*
- ? **What does verse 10 tell us about how He interacted with the world?** *He was in the world He had created.*
- ? **How did those He had created treat Him?** *Many did not receive Him as the Light of the world.*
- ? **What benefit was given to those who did receive Him as the Light?** *They were given the right to become children of God.*
- ? **What does verse 14 clarify about how He interacted with the world?** *He took on flesh and dwelt among men.*
- ? **Who does the “we” in verse 14 refer to?** *John is bearing witness as one of the apostles to Christ coming in the flesh and dwelling among them. We could also extend this pronoun to all those who encountered Jesus in His earthly ministry, but the focus is on the apostles whom He called to be His witnesses.*

Incarnation: from the Latin *carn-* which means flesh. The incarnation is the theological term for Jesus taking on flesh to be born as a man.

John 5:18

John 10:30–33

John 10:27–28

Philippians 2:5–8

Hypostatic Union: Jesus is fully God and fully man, having no mixing of the two natures, but both present in one being, Jesus.

JUSTICE

MERCY

- ? What characteristic does John point out in verse 14? *He points to the glory that they beheld in the Word.*
- ? What is the relationship between the Word and the Father? *He is the only begotten Son of the Father.*
- ? What is the Son full of? *He is full of grace and truth—not in a partial sense of each, but 100% grace and 100% truth.*
- ? Who is this Word/Light/Son we have been describing? *He is Jesus, the Christ, the Word become flesh, the only begotten Son of the Father, who is the Light of the world.*

Discover the Truth

What we have been describing is the doctrine of the Incarnation. The Son had existed eternally with the Father and the Spirit, the three members of the Trinity, before they created the world. As part of the plan of redeeming mankind from the Fall, the Son came to earth in the form of a man. The Eternal Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Many people have a hard time grasping this concept, and rightfully so. It is an amazing miracle—probably the most amazing of all the miracles in the Bible.

Let's look at a few more passages that make clear who Jesus is. *Have a student read each of the following passages aloud and identify what each teaches about Jesus.*

- ? What do we learn about Jesus in John 5:18? *He is equal with God the Father.*
- ? What do we learn about Him in John 10:30–33? *Though He appeared as a man, He was one with the Father. The Jews understood that He was claiming to be God.*
- ? And what does Thomas acknowledge in John 10:27–28? *Upon seeing the resurrected Jesus, he acknowledged that Jesus is his Lord and God.*
- ? Lastly, what do we learn in Philippians 2:5–8? *Jesus humbled Himself to come in the likeness of man even though He was God. This is known as the Hypostatic Union: Jesus was fully God and fully man.*

What an amazing thing to consider. God became a man. The Creator became part of His creation. God humbled Himself as the Son stepped down off the throne, spent 9 months in Mary's womb, and was born to be announced by a bunch of stinky shepherds. Not exactly the type of entrance we would probably plan for ourselves if we were the King and Creator of the universe.

But Jesus was pleased to come in the flesh, live in this broken world, and take the punishment for our sin as the Father poured out the wrath that we deserved upon Him. Praise God for His willingness to humble Himself for our benefit. Praise God for satisfying His justice and His mercy in Christ on our behalf.





Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

Jesus was born to a young couple of little means and laid in a manger. He lived a sinless life in a world that He had created in absolute perfection. We broke the world through our sin, and He was willing to come into our mess so that He could redeem us. Even though He came in the likeness of a man, He was still God. He wasn't a demigod, part god and part human, He was equal with the Father. As a man, He could identify with the temptations we face and be our kinsman-redeemer. As God, He could bear the infinite punishment that our sins deserved. Without the humility of Christ to come as a man, our sins would still be ours to pay for. Praise God for sending His Son for us while we were still sinners.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? 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? *Many people have false concepts about many biblical events due to the influence of movies and dramatic presentations. These often have details added to fill in the gaps of the storyline. While these details can be appropriate and help us visualize and think about these historic truths, we need to be careful to base our thinking on what the Bible actually teaches.*
- ? 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? *As we consider all He has done for us, reading it in His Word, meditating on it, singing about it, etc., it should stir up in us a great desire to love Him and honor Him with every thought, word, and deed.*
- ? How has God demonstrated humility, and what example does this give for us? *We can think of Christ's willingness to humble Himself as an example to follow (Philippians 2:5–8) as we seek to love others as Christ has loved us. However, we cannot limit the Cross to a mere example—it was where our sin was propitiated.*
- ? 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? *Not unlike the concept of the Trinity or God's attributes, the Hypostatic Union is not a contradiction or illogical, but it is difficult for us to fully comprehend. Just as God is 100% holy and 100% wise (as is true of all of His attributes), Jesus was fully God and fully man. While we will never be able to experience this, it is true of Christ, and we must accept it by faith as it is revealed in God's Word.*

? 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? *Showing a willingness to sit down with someone and talk about what they believe about Jesus can offer great opportunities to point them to the truths in Scripture. As we talk with them and show them passages recorded in the New Testament, we can point them to trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior, the whole time doing so with grace and truth as Jesus would.*

? 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? *Satan has sought to distort the message of the gospel and the person and work of Christ in many ways through the millennia. False religious systems with false gospels, and the writings that support them, often have a hint of truth. Both the Mormons and the JWs will talk about Jesus, but the Jesus they refer to is not the biblical Jesus. We should love these people by sharing the true Jesus with them, using the passages we talked about in this lesson, and others, to call them to the truth that Jesus is God and has made a way for them to be forgiven of 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.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for sending His Son to be born humbly and laid in a lowly manger.
- Praise God for the humility demonstrated on our behalf.
- Ask God for wisdom from His Word to share the truth of the gospel with those who reject Jesus as God.