

IN A MANGER

MAIN POINT.

Our greatest gifts are rescue and relationship.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus was born to the Virgin Mary to fulfill Old Testament prophecy and to affirm that He is the sinless Savior—God in the flesh, who came to dwell with people and save us from our sin.





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.

Luke 2

THE GIFT OF SALVATION

LUKE 2:1-14

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.

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!"

THE GIFT OF PRESENCE

LUKE 2:15-20

15 When the angels had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger. 17 After seeing them, they reported the message they were told about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard, which were just as they had been told.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Our greatest gifts are rescue and relationship.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

THE GIFT OF SALVATION

LUKE 2:6-7

“The incarnation of the Son of God in an animal’s feeding trough puts our glory-craving hearts in check. Matthew Henry rightly observed, ‘He well knew how unwilling we are to be meanly lodged, clothed, or fed; how we desire to have our children decorated and indulged; how apt the poor are to envy the rich, and how prone the rich to disdain the poor. But when we by faith view the Son of God being made man and lying in a manger, our vanity, ambition, and envy are checked. We cannot, with this object rightly before us, seek great things for ourselves.’”

Thabiti Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus in Luke*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2018), 42-43.

LUKE 2:8-14

“These despised men hear the most wonderful thing about how this joy comes. It comes through the birth of ‘a Savior . . . who is the Messiah, the Lord’ (v. 11). 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.”

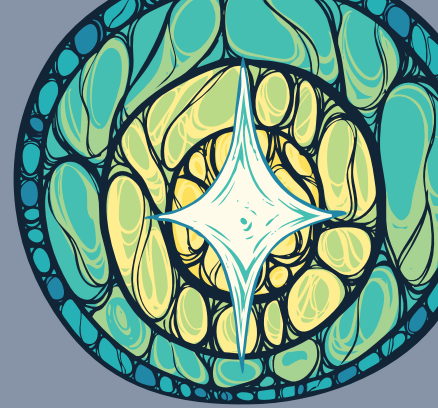
Thabiti Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus in Luke*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2018), 43.

THE GIFT OF PRESENCE

LUKE 2:20

“The gospel does not result, as does Caesar’s ambition to enroll ‘the entire Roman world’ (v. 1) and promote his pretense of deity, in despotism, subjection, or blind obedience. The new community of the manger results in the coming together of disparate groups who hear and speak, marvel and ponder, glorify and praise, and return to useful work in the world.”

James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, ed. D. A. Carson, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 80.



CONTEXT

Background: We often use the word advent to describe the Christmas season. Advent has Latin roots and means “coming” or “arrival.” On the Christian calendar, we label the four weeks leading to Christmas day as Advent, a time for believers to prepare their hearts for celebrating Jesus’ birth. These weeks are marked with reflection, repentance, and gratitude. Traditionally, advent referred to the period before Jesus’ birth, when the people waited and prepared for the Messiah’s coming. Now, believers wait for Jesus’ second coming. In a sense, we are between two advents: We celebrate Jesus’ birth as our Messiah, and we wait for the day He returns as our conquering King to make all things new.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION



God is One in Three Persons

While the Bible affirms that God is one (Mark 12:29; 1 Cor. 8:4-6), it also affirms that God exists as three Persons—Father, Son, and Spirit. Each Person of the Trinity is fully divine—the Father is God (John 6:27), the Son is God (Phil. 2:6), the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4)—and each Person is distinct from the others (Matt. 11:27; John 10:30; 14:16). This perfect unity within the three Persons of the Trinity is a first-order doctrine; departing from it is to abandon orthodox Christianity.

LEADERS' PRAYER

**GOD, THANK YOU FOR SENDING YOUR SON HERE TO SAVE US FROM OUR SIN.
THANK YOU FOR THE GIFT OF YOUR PRESENCE. HELP US TO WORSHIP YOU THIS
CHRISTMAS INSTEAD OF BEING DISTRACTED BY LESSER GIFTS. YOU DESERVE ALL
THE GLORY AND PRAISE.**



KICK STARTER

RATE IT!

When you receive a bad gift, how likely are you to return it to the store (1=Always; 10=I'd feel so guilty)?



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

THE BEST CHRISTMAS GIFT

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

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

- **WHAT CHRISTMAS GIFT STICKS OUT THE MOST FROM YOUR CHILDHOOD? WHY?**
- **WHAT IS THE STRANGEST GIFT YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED?**
- **WHAT MAKES A GIFT MEANINGFUL TO YOU? ARE MEANINGFUL GIFTS ALWAYS EXPENSIVE? EXPLAIN.**

You may have received some amazing gifts over the years. As we get older, our understanding of what makes a gift meaningful tends to shift a bit. We come to realize that an expensive gift can actually have very little meaning. Instead, the gifts that are most valuable to us are often the ones that were costly in another way: sacrifice. When we realize that someone sacrificed their time, their desires, and their needs to do something for us, the gift takes on a greater meaning. Today, we'll see how the gift of salvation through Jesus came with great sacrifice.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Our culture makes a big deal out of Christmas. Red and green decor invade every store, and we cover our houses in lights and host parties. The season is often the backdrop of Hallmark movies, where life is perfect and everything works out okay in the end. But real life doesn't always feel like a Hallmark movie, even at Christmas. Sometimes, the season that is supposed to be full of peace and joy aches with the realities of loneliness, divorce, death, and disappointment. Sometimes, Christmas hurts. But think about it: The reason our pain often feels more intense around Christmastime is because something within us realizes there's more—that there is a void in us that can't be filled with anything or anyone from this world. Christmas is a great reminder that Jesus came to make all of this pain right. Christmas is the reminder that our world is broken by sin and that we desperately need a Savior to fix it—to fix what sin has broken inside of us. So, if Christmas hurts for you, know that Jesus is with you in your pain. He came to give you peace. He was born for this very reason: to redeem what sin has broken.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Our greatest gifts are rescue and relationship.

THE GIFT OF SALVATION

READ LUKE 2:1-14



IF SOMEONE ASKED YOU WHY CHRISTMAS MATTERS, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

Most people would say Christmas is meaningful. If we aren't careful, we root Christmas' meaning in shallow reasons—gifts, parties, decorations. Now, these are good gifts from God, but Christmas matters because it's the story of God fulfilling His greatest promise—the promise to send a Savior. **Christmas matters because God came down; He came here.** The false gods of ancient cultures never dwelled with humans; they were unreachable, without access. They were no gods at all. But our great God, the Lord of heaven and earth, came down! Christmas matters because our Savior was born!



THE ANGEL SAID, "A SAVIOR WAS BORN FOR YOU." WHAT DOES THIS HELP YOU UNDERSTAND ABOUT THE WAY GOD SEES US?

The shepherds were terrified when the angel of the Lord appeared. The angel announced good news "for all the people" but then made the news personal: A Savior was born for you. See, these shepherds were outcasts—men who slept outside with the sheep, unwelcomed in religious circles, isolated, and often despised. But God's message was this: God's Son is here for you! Jesus came for you too. **This gift of Jesus' birth is personal because God loves you. Jesus came for the sinners, the outcasts, the unwelcomed, isolated, and despised. He came for us all.**



HOW WOULD THE *CHRISTMAS* STORY BE DIFFERENT IF JESUS HAD BEEN BORN TO A WEALTHY, NOBLE FAMILY IN A PALACE? WHY DO THE DETAILS OF HIS BIRTH MATTER?

Jesus' birth is ironic: The King of the kings was born in the most humble place. Though He was worthy of a palace and extravagant celebrations, the Son of God was placed in a feeding trough for animals. But if Jesus had been born into royalty, He wouldn't have been accessible to lowly shepherds, to sinners, to the sick, to the rejected. Only society's privileged elite would've been given access to Him. A royal birth would've fit the Jews' traditional view of the Messiah—that He would come as a great political or military leader, freeing Israel and making it a powerful nation. Instead, the Messiah came as a servant and pointed to a greater kingdom, where the last is first and the greatest are the least (Matt. 19:30). **The details of Jesus' birth matter greatly because in them, we see God's heart. God gave all people access to Himself through the Son. God came for the worst of us. Jesus' birth opened the way for those who would've been kept at a distance to draw near (Eph. 2:12-13). God meets us where we are, and Jesus' birth reminds us of this.**

THE GIFT OF PRESENCE

READ LUKE 2:15-20

WHICH IS THE BETTER: RECEIVING MATERIAL GIFTS OR THE GIFT OF SOMEONE'S TIME AND LOVE? EXPLAIN.

As children, we may feel like nothing is greater than opening gifts. Sure, gifts are fun, but they're more meaningful when paired with the giver's presence and love. For example, if a parent buys a child all of the most expensive gifts but never spends time with him or her, then the gifts lose meaning. What we desire, really, is our parents' love and time. Their presence makes us feel loved and safe. **Without presence, a gift loses value; with presence and relationship, even a gift that didn't cost much increases in value. The person's presence, sacrificing his or her time to be with us, is what we remember.**



WHAT DOES GOD SAVING US BY SENDING JESUS TO BE WITH US HELP YOU UNDERSTAND ABOUT HIM?

God didn't save us from a distance. Let that sink in. The Son of God, Immanuel, is "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). Jesus came to earth to be with us, to be like us in our humanity. What does this show? Salvation isn't just about escaping punishment; it's receiving the incredible gift of God's presence. **God saves us from sin and for relationship with Him.** And He did this by coming to us—not by coming only halfway and making us work to meet Him in the middle. God met us here, in our sin and in our humanity. **Our salvation was always about the gift of relationship—Jesus paying the price for our sin, restoring us, and then sending the Holy Spirit to be with us every single moment! God's desire to be with us is proof of His great love.**

WHAT DID THE SHEPHERDS DO AS A RESULT OF EXPERIENCING JESUS' PRESENCE? HOW CAN THIS CONVICT US AND MOTIVATE US?

When lowly shepherds experienced the Messiah's presence, they ran to tell others; they couldn't contain what they knew. Then, they glorified and praised God; in other words, they worshiped. Like the shepherds, we've encountered Jesus and been filled with His Spirit, even though we're undeserving. Instead of running to tell others about the greatest gift, we let the fear of being rejected, gossiped about, or made fun of keep us quiet. We quickly forget the miracle of what God has done for us through Jesus and fail to worship and glorify Him with our lives. **Encountering Jesus must lead us to action—to sharing Him with others and worshiping Him in gratitude.**

WRAP-UP



WHAT PRACTICAL WAYS CAN YOU CENTER YOUR HEART ON THE GIFT OF GOD'S PRESENCE THROUGH JESUS THIS CHRISTMAS?

Let's be real: The Christmas season is fun. We exchange gifts, eat good food, and get time out of school. But if we make any of this our reasons for celebrating, then we replace the *real* gift—Jesus—with far lesser gifts. This year, spend time reflecting on Jesus' birth as the greatest gift, one wrapped in freedom, salvation, forgiveness, peace, comfort—all because Jesus came *down* and is Immanuel, God with us. If you're celebrating anything else, then you're cheapening God's gift. Consider making a worshipful Christmas playlist and journaling about the lyrics, caring for those in need, listing specific gifts from Jesus, using social media to share content about Jesus, and sharing the gift of the gospel with others. **When we center our hearts on Jesus, we position ourselves to experience Christmas in a way that honors the Lord for sending His precious Son for us. We experience a deeper joy that lasts instead of excitement that fades with time.**