

SESSION 4

JESUS SAVES

▶ **The Point**

Jesus was born to bring us into a relationship with God.

▶ **The Passage**

Luke 2:4-20

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

There's no doubt that Hawaii is one of the most beautiful places on earth. Given that reality, many people are surprised to learn that, during the 1800s, one of its islands housed a leper colony. Hawaiians who contracted Hansen's disease were sent to the island of Molokai to be quarantined.

One Roman Catholic priest named Damien saw the beauty not only of the island, but also the forgotten people who lived there. Father Damien made Molokai his home for sixteen years, choosing to live among the lepers, preach the gospel, and serve them. He used a variety of methods to restore a sense of community to the people of Molokai, but he was still an outsider. When he preached, he often started his sermons by saying, "You lepers..."

Then, a day came when Father Damien started to preach with a new phrase: "We lepers..." He had contracted the disease himself.¹ In a similar way, God came to earth to live among us and say, "We humans." Jesus became one of us. That's what Christmas is all about.

▶ **The Setting**

Luke began his Gospel account with the angel Gabriel's annunciation of the coming births of both John the Baptist (see Luke 1:5-25) and Jesus. (See vv. 26-38.) After recording the events surrounding the birth of John the Baptist, who would be the forerunner of the Messiah (see vv. 57-80), Luke wrote of the birth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. (See 2:1-20.)

What does the Bible say?

To be registered (v. 5)— Roman emperor Augustus required a mandatory census of all people in the empire. (See Luke 2:1.) Male Jews returned to their ancestral homes to register.

Messiah (v. 11)— Transliteration of the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek term *christos*, meaning “anointed one.” It refers generally to anyone set apart for God’s service; it refers specifically to God’s Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Luke 2:4-20

⁴ Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, ⁵ to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to give birth.

⁷ Then she gave birth to her firstborn Son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. ⁸ In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: ¹¹ Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!”

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.



STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Luke 2:4-7

⁴ Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, ⁵ to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ Then she gave birth to her firstborn Son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

READ: Luke 2:4-7 on page 39 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.



LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 5**, “First-Century Home,” but keep the poster covered with a sheet of paper or a cloth. Ask group members to share what they’ve been taught about the place where Jesus was born—the structure where Mary and Joseph were given shelter. After volunteers have shared, remove the covering to reveal the artist’s rendition of the house where Jesus was born.

SUMMARIZE: Help group members engage the main points from pages 39-40 of the PSG:

1. “King David has always been one of the most important figures in Jewish history. He was the ideal example of a God-fearing king—a fearless warrior who trusted the Lord to protect him even against staggering odds.”
2. “Because Caesar Augustus wanted a census taken of his entire empire, Joseph had to report back to the town of his ancestors. That meant traveling to Bethlehem, ‘the city of David.’”
3. “It’s good to plan, but things don’t always go according to our timing. God is at work behind the scenes of our lives, just as He was with Joseph and Mary.”

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 39 of the PSG: **“What do you find most surprising in these verses?”**

TRANSITION: Jesus was born in a strange place for a king. As we move to verses 8-14, we’ll see that His birth was also announced in a strange way.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What are some ways Jesus’ birth reveals God’s perfect timing?

Luke 2:4-7 Commentary

[Verse 4] Luke's account of Jesus' birth begins with a simple man from a simple town. **Joseph** was a carpenter by trade. (See Matt. 13:55.) **Nazareth**, his home, was a humble village tucked away in lower Galilee. Even **Bethlehem**, the **city of David**, where Joseph had to travel, was little more than a small village a few miles outside of Jerusalem.

Joseph was **of the house and family line of David**. In his Gospel, Matthew provided a detailed genealogy of Joseph's family lineage through King David and all the way back to the Old Testament patriarch Abraham (see Matt. 1:1-16), affirming what Luke recorded about Joseph's connection to David. (See Luke 1:27,32-33.) Luke's only previous mention of Joseph appears in the context of Joseph's relationship with Mary. (See v. 27.)

[Verse 5] Joseph and Mary made the trip to Bethlehem so that Joseph could **be registered** for the mandatory census decreed by the Roman emperor Augustus. (See 2:1-3.) The journey covered approximately 85-90 miles and would have taken several days to complete on foot.

The trip apparently took place sometime after God spoke to Joseph in a dream and told him to move forward with his plans to take Mary as his wife, even though she was pregnant. (See Matt. 1:20-25.) Regarding Luke's words—**Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant**—one commentator notes: "This is an unusual way of expressing a journey made by a husband and wife. Luke may have been suggesting here what Matthew 1:25 states explicitly, that the marriage had not yet been consummated, although Mary was living as a wife with Joseph (as her going to Bethlehem with him suggests)."^{*}

[Verse 6] Luke does not indicate whether **the time came for [Mary] to give birth** to Jesus immediately upon the couple's arrival in Bethlehem or if the event happened some time after their arrival. Either way, the timing was no coincidence. From a prophetic perspective, the location of Bethlehem as the place for Jesus' birth was imperative. Micah had predicted that the Savior would be born there (see Mic. 5:2), a fact known by those who studied the Old Testament Scriptures at that time. (See Matt. 2:3-8.) So, the timing of the census and Joseph and Mary's journey were both part of the fulfillment of this prophecy. Jesus' birth occurred at the appointed time according to God's plan. (See Gal. 4:4-5.)

[Verse 7] Mary **gave birth to her firstborn Son**. As was common with newborn babies in the first century, Mary wrapped Jesus tightly in strips of cloth (a practice also known as swaddling). This was done to restrict the movement of the newborn child's arms and legs, keeping them straight. A **manger** (feeding trough) served as a cradle. Scripture does not identify the location of this manger, noting only that **there was no guest room available** for Joseph, Mary, and their newborn baby.

^{*} Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 107.



STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

Luke 2:8-14

⁸ *In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock.* ⁹ *Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.* ¹⁰ *But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: "* ¹¹ *Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord.* ¹² *This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger."* ¹³ *Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: "* ¹⁴ *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!"*

READ: Luke 2:8-14 on page 40 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 40 of the PSG: **"What do these verses teach us about the purpose of Jesus' birth?"**

RECAP: Read aloud the final two paragraphs on page 41 of the PSG:

"The angel didn't go to a political leader, Caesar's palace, or the temple where priests were going about their priestly duties. Instead, the angel went straight to those in the lowliest position. To these men who tended lambs, the angel announced salvation had come into the world.

The news was too good for just one angel. He was suddenly joined by a multitude of angels. Praise filled the sky as they proclaimed, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!'"

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Bring some quality speakers to your gathering and play Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus." Turn the volume to high and encourage group members to imagine what it must have been like for the shepherds that night.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 41 of the PSG: **"What steps can we take to experience peace during the Christmas season?"**

TRANSITION: Verses 15-20 show the shepherds first encounter with Jesus.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What promises are included in these verses?

Luke 2:8-14 Commentary

[Verse 8] In the fields outside Bethlehem, **shepherds** were **keeping watch** over their sheep. Often, several shepherds would bring their flocks together for pasturing in the same area.

[Verse 9] The shepherds were visited by **an angel of the Lord** and **the glory of the Lord shone around them**. The angel brought a message from God. (See Luke 1:11-20,26-38.) The “glory of the Lord” describes the manifestation of God’s presence (see Ex. 16:7,10; 24:17; 40:34), the One who had both sent the angel and brought the events to pass. The shepherds were **terrified**, a common response to the appearance of an angel. (See Luke 1:12,29.)

[Verse 10] In an effort to calm the shepherds, the angel said, **“Don’t be afraid.”** The angel brought them **good news of great joy**. What’s more, this good news would be **for all the people**. Jesus’ birth (and subsequent life, death, and resurrection) would be good news of great joy for the people of every nation and culture. (See Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8; 15:1-29.)

[Verse 11] **Today** indicates the dawn of a new era, inaugurated by the birth of the Messiah. That Jesus’ birth occurred in Bethlehem, **the city of David**, the foretold birthplace of the Messiah, emphasized Jesus’ role as the promised Messiah. The angel identified Jesus by three titles. First, He is the **Savior**. Joseph had been commanded by an angel of the Lord to name his and Mary’s son “Jesus” (“God saves”) because “he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). In His role as Savior, Jesus Himself said He had come “to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). The angel also said Jesus was the **Messiah** (“anointed One”), the king from the line of David promised by God who would deliver His people. Finally, the angel called Jesus **Lord**. This title highlights Jesus’ divine authority. Elsewhere, Luke used the term “Lord” to describe Jesus (see Luke 1:43,76) and in reference to the sovereignty of God the Father. (See vv. 16,46,68.)

[Verse 12] The angel gave a specific **sign** as to where in Bethlehem the shepherds could find this baby. **“You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger.”** The angel’s words touched on the irony of the situation. While Jesus is Savior, Messiah, and Lord, the shepherds would not find Him in a palace among the rich and powerful—or even in the nicest home Bethlehem had to offer. Instead, He would be wrapped in cloth and found lying in a feeding trough.

[Verses 13-14] The sudden appearance of a **multitude of the heavenly host** was yet another indication to the shepherds that something miraculous and life-changing had happened. These angels were **praising God**. They gave **glory to God**, “glory” being another word for praise offered to God. The **highest heaven** is the heavenly realm where God and the angels reside. The heavenly host gave God praises for both who He is and what He has done. **Peace** refers to the fullness of blessing which the Savior brings; it is essentially a synonym for salvation. The recipients of this peace are those who respond in faith to the good news of salvation found in God’s Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Luke 2:15-20 Commentary

[Verse 15] After the angels left, the shepherds decided to make the trip to Bethlehem. Luke paid special attention to the shepherds' immediate obedience: **"Let's go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened."** The shepherds recognized that even though the news of the events was announced by the angels, it was a message directly from God—**"which the Lord has made known to us."**

[Verse 16] The shepherds **hurried off** to Bethlehem and **found** everything exactly as the angel had told them. Mary and Joseph were there with the baby Jesus, who was wrapped in cloth and lying in a feeding trough. The accuracy of the angel's words likely served to confirm both the truth and the importance of the event in the minds of the shepherds.

[Verses 17-18] As the angels had shared the good news of Jesus' birth with the shepherds, now the shepherds **reported the message they were told about this child**. They told others about what they had experienced—likely beginning with the message of the angel and including their encounter with the new Messiah. Just as they had been quick in seeking out the newborn Messiah, they did not wait to begin sharing what they had seen and experienced. **All who heard it** likely referred to the residents of Bethlehem, but could have extended to others the shepherds encountered along the way back to their fields. Those who heard the shepherds' report **were amazed** at the shepherds' story.

[Verse 19] Luke painted a contrast between the joyful enthusiasm of the shepherds and the quiet contemplation of Mary, who **was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them**. While she had been told about the special nature of Jesus' conception and purpose in life (see Luke 1:26-38), she may not have had a full understanding of the meaning of those events. However, the words Luke used indicate that she wanted to remember the events she was experiencing. The Greek term translated "was treasuring up" has the meaning of keeping something close to one's heart or purposefully preserving events in one's memory. It suggests Mary meditated or deeply reflected on the events in an effort to better understand their significance.

[Verse 20] Earlier, the shepherds had witnessed the angelic host praising and glorifying God. Now the shepherds followed their example as they **returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard**. The veracity of the events is indicated by Luke noting what the shepherds had seen and experienced was **just as they had been told** by the angel.

The shepherds received a special gift that night, and they were willing to share that gift with others. As they made their way back to their flocks, the shepherds continued talking about the good news, **glorifying and praising God**. Luke noted that these humble shepherds shared what **they had seen and heard**. (See v. 17.) In other words, they simply told others what had happened to them.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 44 of the PSG. Encourage them to considering these suggestions for allowing Jesus’ birth to influence their lives this week:



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Treasure.** Think on the things you’ve seen or heard that have confirmed God’s reality and power to you. Treasure these moments in your heart so you can recall them when times get rough.
- ▶ **Write.** Write out your testimony—what Jesus has done in your life—and pray about finding one person you can share it with this week.
- ▶ **Celebrate.** Determine one or more ways you can turn the celebration of Christmas into a proclamation of what Christ has done for you. How can you, like the shepherds, proclaim what you’ve seen and heard about Jesus?

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 44 of the PSG:

Jesus didn’t become part of our world for some cosmic tourism opportunity. He came on a mission to restore our relationships with God. He came to give us an opportunity to connect with God in a meaningful way. How will you respond?

PRAY: Conclude by imitating the angels in Luke 2 and proclaiming glory to God in the highest. Praise God for His incredible gift of salvation through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.



MINISTRY GRID
training made simple

Get expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid.

MinistryGrid.com/web/BibleStudiesForLife