



Savior

JESUS, THE LONG-AWAITED MESSIAH, WAS BORN IN BETHLEHEM JUST AS THE PROPHETS FORETOLD.

Scripture Passage: Luke 2:8-20 **Memory Verse: Luke 2:11**

According to the old saying, "familiarity breeds contempt." Often, familiarity breeds invisibility. Given enough time, we might start overlooking things that once were important. You place a note on the mirror or refrigerator to remind you of an important thought or critical meeting. After several weeks, you no longer see the note. You're no longer reminded of what was important.

Unfortunately, this is true with Christmas. Around the fourth century, Christmas as we know it was established as an important church holy day. As centuries have passed, though, the reverence of Christmas has been lost in a sea of gifts, decorations, Santa, and reindeer. Today, this sacred celebration looks more and more like a secular holiday. Familiarity has created a degree of apathy toward Jesus and His birth.

As you teach this Christmas session, recommit to honoring the spiritual significance of this familiar passage and this familiar time of year. Examine ways you have allowed the true meaning of Christmas to become invisible in your life. And challenge adults to turn their hearts back to the true reason for the season.

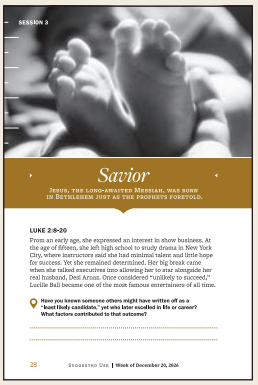
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From an early age, she expressed an interest in show business. At 15, she left high school to study drama in New York City, where instructors said she had minimal talent and little hope for success. Yet she remained determined. Her big break came when she talked executives into allowing her to star alongside her real husband, Desi Arnaz. Once considered "unlikely to succeed," Lucille Ball became one of the most famous entertainers of all time. (PSG, p. 28)

Have you known someone others might have written off as a "least likely candidate," yet who later excelled in life or career? What factors contributed to that outcome?


SESSION 3

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LUKE 2:8–20

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28 SUGGESTED USE | Week of December 20, 2026

Understand the Context (Luke 2:1-20)

Of the four Gospels, Luke includes the most historical details. This is illustrated with his narration of Jesus's birth. Luke sought to set the Nativity in its historical context in the first three verses of his Gospel.

Over the years, some scholars have pointed out supposed inaccuracies in dates, geographic locations, and personal identities in Luke's writings. Yet archaeology consistently dispels the doubts and verifies Luke's accuracy.

In Luke 2, readers find his first historical marker in the identity of the Roman emperor at the time of Christ's birth. He was Gaius Octavius, who carried the title Caesar Augustus. He was the adopted son of Julius Caesar. In the struggle for the throne of Rome that followed Julius's assassination in 44 BC, Octavius eventually defeated Marc Anthony and Cleopatra in 31 BC. His ascension signaled the historical beginning of the Roman Empire. The Roman senate gave him the title Augustus (meaning "revered" or "honored"). He ruled as emperor until his death in AD 14.

While he did not know it, Augustus played a role in God's plan for the coming Messiah by ordering a census for the entire empire. Most likely, this census was a registration associated with taxation, and it required everyone to travel back to their ancestral home. As a result, Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem, where Jesus would be born in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Mic. 5:2).

Luke's second historical marker was the Roman governor, Quirinius. Archaeological discoveries indicated that Quirinius was a governing official of Syria during two different periods. He ruled the region between 6–4 BC and again between AD 6–9.

Evidently, the census included a deadline for the registration to be completed. Otherwise, Joseph certainly would not have traveled the eighty-five or ninety miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem with Mary until the child was born.

One might wonder why Mary accompanied Joseph in the first place. Some historical evidence suggests that women also had to register. In the end, Luke simply doesn't tell us.

Luke noted that Mary and Joseph were engaged at this point. In ancient Israel, a betrothal was much more legally binding than engagements today. Luke's statement aligns with Matthew's explanation that they were married but had not consummated the marriage yet (Matt. 1:24-25).

While in Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to her "firstborn son" (Luke 2:7). The Greek wording indicates the first of several children. As Luke later affirms, other children were born to Mary and Joseph (8:19-20).

As you read Luke 2:1-20 in your Bible, look for evidence of God elevating the humble. (PSG, p. 29)

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ENGAGE



PREPARE: On a focal wall, display **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Key Verse: Luke 2:11*). Prepare copies of Luke 2:13-15 as a dramatic reading for a narrator, the angels, and the shepherds.

READ: Share that the group will take a break from 1 Samuel to examine Luke's account of Jesus's birth. Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 28 of the PSG.

ASK: **Have you known someone others might have written off as a "least likely candidate," yet who later excelled in life or career?** (PSG, p. 28)

DISCUSS: Lead a brief discussion on responses. Note that most people have known individuals whose lives turned out different than anyone expected.

ASK: **What factors contributed to that outcome?** (PSG, p. 28)

CONTEXT: Point out that many people in Israel were waiting for the Messiah to establish God's kingdom, but most were not expecting Him to come like Jesus did. Explain how Luke's Gospel reveals a unique side of Jesus's ministry.

> *One of the major themes in Luke's Gospel was Jesus's showing compassion and offering support to the seemingly insignificant of His day. . . . He emphasized that Jesus reached out to Samaritans, tax collectors, women, children, and the poor. He alone spoke of the celebration that occurs when the lost are found, even rebellious prodigals who are welcomed home with open arms. Over and again, Luke showed how God included and elevated the humble and brought down those who were proud.* (PSG, p. 29)

TRANSITION: *In today's session, we'll study how the good news of Jesus's birth took place in an unlikely setting and was announced to an unlikely audience.*

Group Activity Option

Music

Provide hymnals and guide adults to "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" (*Baptist Hymnal 2008*, No. 192). After leading adults to sing the song, direct them to scan the verses for titles and names of Jesus. Ask: ***Which names or titles of Jesus do you most often think of when telling the Christmas story? Why?***

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A Savior is Born (Luke 2:8-12)

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."

(v. 8) Coinciding with Jesus's birth was an angelic announcement to ***shepherds*** tending their ***flock*** near Bethlehem. According to tradition, sheep pastured in this area were often offered as temple sacrifices. Ancient *shepherds* in this region generally kept the sheep in the fields from early spring to late autumn, making it difficult to identify the season of Christ's birth with any certainty.

That shepherds were the first to hear the good news of the Messiah's birth could be surprising. In that culture, shepherds generally were looked down on and considered unclean, uneducated, and unsavory. Often, they were considered unreliable and dishonest. Because they stayed in the fields for weeks at a time, attendance at temple or synagogue worship may have been sporadic.

However, these men probably were like many in Judea and Galilee at the time. In fact, the arrival of the angels could suggest they were devout and eagerly anticipating the Messiah.

(v. 9) Out of the darkness, an ***angel of the Lord*** (possibly Gabriel, Luke 1:11-20) suddenly appeared. Accompanying the *angel* was the brilliant splendor of the ***glory of the Lord***. God's *glory* had departed from the temple in Ezekiel's day because of Israel's rebellion (Ezek. 9–11). Its presence here provided a visible sign that God's presence was once again intersecting the world.

As one might expect, the shepherds ***were terrified***. This was a common response in Scripture to the appearance of an angel and the presence of the glory of God. The children of Israel experienced the same terror when they encountered God's glory at Mount Sinai (Ex. 20:18-20).

(v. 10) Aware of the shepherds' state of mind, the angel commanded them ***don't be afraid***. These were the same words spoken to both Zechariah (Luke 1:13) and to Mary (1:30). As with them, the angel gave a sign that his announcement was true. For Zechariah it was his inability to speak, while for Mary it was Elizabeth's pregnancy. For the shepherds, it was the unusual prospect of a newborn lying in a manger (v. 12).

The angel brought a message of ***great joy***. The word ***proclaim*** in Greek means "to preach" ***good news***. This is the same word we use for "evangelism." The proclamation affirmed that God was sending salvation into the world. The *joy* would apply to ***all the people***, both Jews and Gentiles alike (2:30-32).

(vv. 11-12) Commonly, Jerusalem was known as the ***city of David***, but here Luke applied the name to Bethlehem, the ancestral home of David. The angel used three different titles for Jesus. Each term defines His identify in a unique way.

First, He is ***Savior***, the One who came to save people from the penalty of sin (Matt. 1:21). Next, He is the ***Messiah***, the "anointed One" sent from God and appointed to sit on David's throne. Finally, He is ***Lord***, pointing to His supreme authority. *Lord* equates God the Son with God the Father. From the beginning, Luke verified that Jesus was God in human flesh.

The angel's announcement came with a validating sign. The child was ***wrapped tightly in cloth***, like any other infant would be. But He also was ***lying in a manger***, or an animal's feeding trough. This detail illustrates the humble manner in which Jesus entered this world.

Key Doctrine

God the Son

In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. (See Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-23.)

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APPLICATION POINT: We can be assured that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah whom the prophets foretold.

READ: **Call on a volunteer to read aloud Luke 2:8-12** while the group listens for the titles given to Jesus. Allow volunteers to call out the titles they heard. Record them on the board.

SUMMARIZE: Explain what Luke meant by the "glory of the Lord":

> *God's glory refers to His radiant majesty. His glory appeared when He provided the Israelites with manna, established His covenant at Sinai, and descended at the consecration of the tabernacle and the temple (Ex. 16:6-15; 24:12-18; 40:33-35; 1 Kings 8:1-11; 2 Chron. 5:1-14). Habakkuk declared that God's glory will fill the earth in the end time (Hab. 2:2-20). Here, God's glory appeared in an open field, beheld by lowly shepherds. This showed that God would be working in an unexpected way.* (PSG, p. 30)

DEFINE: Guide adults to create three teams. (*For smaller groups, an individual can be a team.*) Assign each team one of these titles for Jesus: *Savior, Messiah, Lord*. Direct them to review the content on page 31 of the PSG and to create a definition of their assigned title. After a few minutes, allow volunteers from each team to read their definitions.

ASK: **Why do you think God chose to tell the good news of His Son to lowly shepherds? What implications does that have for today?** (PSG, p. 31)

RECITE: Point to **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Key Verse: Luke 2:11*). Guide adults to read the verse aloud together. Challenge them to memorize the verse and to reflect on it throughout the Christmas season.



Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Consider the reactions of the shepherds to the appearance of the angel. Read Luke 2:9-11 and respond to these questions: ***What was so significant to these Jewish shepherds in the words of the angel? What part of the event would have produced fear? What part of the angel's announcement would have brought joy? What words of the angel would create questions in the shepherd's minds? What is significant to you from the words of this announcement? What emotions and questions does this account create in your own heart and mind?***

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Peace is Available (Luke 2:13-15)

**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."**

(v. 13) Quite suddenly, a ***multitude of the heavenly host*** appeared with the angel. We get the word "plethora" from this Greek word, and it speaks here of the armies of heaven. No doubt this appearance added to the amazement of the shepherds. The appearance of this great number of angels further validated the incredible news. This *host* of angels was ***praising God***, offering a glimpse of how the Messiah's birth was viewed in heaven.

(v. 14) The angels' message reflects parallelism, a poetic device often used in Hebrew literature, especially in Psalms and Proverbs. This method repeats a thought using different words for emphasis. In this verse, the parallel thoughts relate to ***glory*** and ***peace***. Similar, but contrasting, parallel images include ***in the highest*** and ***on earth***, as well as ***to God*** and ***to people he favors***.

The entire plan of salvation reaching fulfillment through the birth of Christ was designed to bring *glory to God*. The word "glory" speaks of weighty importance. If reflects significance and honor. Again, God's matchless presence was coming to earth in human flesh.

Nowhere is His glory more front and center than in this act, what theologians call the incarnation of Jesus. In his Gospel, John echoed the magnitude of the event: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

The angels praised God *in the highest*. This phrase could have four meanings: First, it could emphasize God being glorified in the highest manner possible. It also could suggest a call to praise for those who inhabit the highest heaven, including the angels. A third option is that God should be glorified in both heaven and on earth. Finally, the term could focus on Him receiving glory as the most high God.

Peace speaks of the satisfaction and security that comes from God's fullest blessing. This peace is found only in Jesus. Primarily, it describes individuals who are at peace with God because they are in right standing with God through Christ. Augustus, the Roman emperor, was the most powerful man on the earth in this day. He enforced what scholars call the *Pax Romana* or "Roman peace," which led to a cessation of external wars around empire. But, for all his power, Augustus could never ensure the internal peace and security for which people longed. In contrast, Jesus did not come to ensure external peace. His peace brings the end to the turmoil, fear, and emptiness produced by sin.

As the birth of Jesus is a gift from God, the surpassing peace that God provides is also a gift from Him (Phil. 4:7). That truth is found in the phrase *to people he favors*. God's gracious favor extends to those who embrace a relationship with Him through the Messiah.

(v. 15) Because the shepherds' hearts were open to the Messiah's coming, they didn't hesitate to follow through on the angel's announcement. They determined to ***go straight to Bethlehem*** so they could ***see what has happened***. Notice they took the angel's word as coming directly from God: ***the Lord has made known***.

No doubt they had to make arrangements for the sheep's care, but as soon as possible, they made their way to Bethlehem and searched for a baby in a manger. Their quick obedience and ready willingness to see God's promised Savior stands in stark contrast to the response of others who were made aware of the Messiah's birth.

Matthew noted that religious leaders in Jerusalem were informed of the miracle through the wise men, but they did not make any attempt to see the One they claimed to expect. Bethlehem was only six miles from Jerusalem, but they were so apathetic to the movement of God that they couldn't go check things out for themselves. The Gospels often distinguish between the faithlessness of those who should know better and the eager acceptance of so-called outcasts.

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APPLICATION POINT: **We can experience peace through saving faith in Jesus Christ.**

READING: Distribute copies of Luke 2:13-15 written in the form of a dramatic reading with parts for a narrator, the angels, and the shepherds. **Enlist three volunteers to share Luke 2:13-15** as a dramatic reading.

ASK: **What message did the angelic host proclaim? What are the greatest needs for peace today?**

RECAP: Summarize this content from page 32 of the PSG to highlight God's glory and the peace He alone provides:

> "The heavenly hosts' proclamation pointed in two directions, to the 'highest heaven' and to 'earth.' The focus in heaven would be glory to God; the focus on earth, peace . . . to people. This *peace* referred to peace from grief, anger, jealousy, resentment, and hurting hearts. Even the pagans of the first century longed for this type of peace. The heavenly host's proclamation pointed back to the promise of Isaiah, that the One who would reign on the throne of David was coming as the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6-7). . . . All of heaven would proclaim God's glory; all on earth can experience His peace. The original Greek manuscript had no punctuation. Having a comma before that phrase seems to help clarify that this babe would issue in peace on earth, meaning to all, because He favors all people. This is consistent with the earlier statement of the angel, that his good news of great joy was for all people (v. 10)."

ASK: **What are some proper responses for believers who have heard the gospel message?** (PSG, p. 33)

DISCUSS: Guide adults to consider the content of the angelic message and the response of the shepherds. Lead a brief discussion on the peace Jesus provides. Highlight the immediate response of the shepherds to make the trip to Bethlehem.

TRANSITION: *Even though the shepherds might seem to be an unlikely bunch to hear the good news of Jesus's birth, their eager response was motivated by faith, joy, and excitement. They accepted the angels' message, and they wanted to be a part of what God was doing.*

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Jesus's Birth Proclaimed (Luke 2:16-20)

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.

(v. 16) Acting on the angel's announcement, the text tells us ***they hurried off***. While we don't know if the shepherds made their way to Bethlehem at night or waited until daybreak, the text implies they moved out as quickly as possible. Apparently, no potential obstacle posed too great a challenge for these men.

After arriving in Bethlehem, they ***found*** what they had come to see. The Greek word speaks of "finding by diligent search." They were looking for the specific sign given to them by the angel: a ***baby who was lying in the manger***. Thus, the sign given by the angel was fulfilled as prophesied.

Luke's Gospel mentions that they also found ***Mary and Joseph*** with the child. Luke is not implying that *Joseph* was Jesus's father. Earlier in the Gospel, he had affirmed the virgin birth of Jesus (Luke 1:26-38). Rather, Joseph is mentioned because he was betrothed to Mary and was the reason they were in Bethlehem.

(vv. 17-18) We have no idea how long the shepherds spent with Jesus's family. We also have no idea what conversations transpired between them and Mary and Joseph. No doubt the shepherds recounted the appearance of the angel and the heavenly host. And we know that Mary thought a lot about what the shepherds had described (v. 19).

Beyond that, we have no certainty as to the content of this visit. What we do know is that this event made a tremendous impact on the shepherds. Even after visiting the manger, they chose to talk to everyone they met. They quickly spread the ***message they were told about this child.***

Before returning to their flocks, the men first went throughout Bethlehem telling everyone they met about the angel, his message, the heavenly hosts, and the newborn child. While Jewish law forbid shepherds from testifying in court, God used them to testify to His greatest act in history!

Luke pointed out that ***all who heard it were amazed***. The word *amazed* means to "marvel or wonder." This was a much-used term in Luke's writings. It is found thirteen times in his Gospel and five times in the book of Acts. The spreading of the news and the reaction of people in and around Bethlehem is comparable to how Zechariah and Elizabeth received the news about John the Baptist in Luke 1:65-66.

(v. 19) Luke also offered a glimpse of Mary's response to the sequence of events taking place around her and her newborn. Demonstrating a reflective nature, she was ***treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them***. The term *meditating* means "to throw together" and relates to pondering on something. That is, she was putting everything together and mulling them over in her heart, weighing each word spoken and each event that occurred.

Understandably, she wasn't sure how to react to this attention given to her child. The same thing happened several days later when Jesus was presented in the temple to Simeon and Anna. Everyone in the temple was told about the child (Luke 2:21-38). Years later, when twelve-year-old Jesus said He had to be "in my Father's house," Mary again "kept all these things in her heart" (2:49,51).

(v. 20) The shepherds followed the lead of the angels by ***glorifying and praising God*** for the experiences of this unique night. The word *praising* is the same word used to describe the message of the heavenly host. This might imply that the praise of the shepherds was a song, perhaps one from the book of Psalms.

Everything the angel had told the shepherds was true. Eventually, they returned to their sheep and things returned to their normal rhythms. However, it is fair to assume that these men never really got over their encounter with God's Messiah!

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APPLICATION POINT: **Believers should tell others of all God has done.**

READ: **Call on a volunteer to read aloud Luke 2:16-20** as adults listen for all the actions the shepherds took and what Mary did.

LIST: Guide adults to share the shepherds' response. Record their response on the board. Point out what they did before visiting Jesus and after visiting the manger.

DISCUSS: **What do you think the shepherds were thinking and feeling on the way to Bethlehem?** Discuss responses.

RECAP: Explain why the shepherds may have reacted as they did. Share this information to contrast Mary's response:

> *Rather than talk about the events, Mary treasured them, keeping the details in her heart. Part of what she must have been pondering was the news that the shepherds had told her, about the angels' appearing and the revelation about her Son's identity as the Savior, Messiah, and Lord. The Greek words translated "treasuring" and "meditating" show that these were continual actions. The meditating means to consider, combine, and join. This shows that Mary kept mulling over the details, trying to get the full picture of all that had and was occurring.* (PSG, p. 34)

EXPLAIN: Highlight the shepherds' willingness to share the Messiah's birth with others. Note that they were not inhibited or fearful about letting others know what God was doing and what He had shown them.

ASK: **What would you like others to know about Jesus and the difference He makes in your life?** (PSG, p. 35)

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Nativity Set

Prior to the session, secure a Nativity set and place it on a table in your meeting space. Allow volunteers to share briefly about Nativity sets around their houses. Point out the set on the table. After reading Luke 2:16-20, encourage adults to identify the characters in the scene and to share what they think those people were doing and thinking that night. Mention that adults could do this same activity with their families, especially children, as a way to focus attention on Jesus during the Christmas season.

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CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from Apply the Text on page 36 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *We can be assured that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah whom the prophets foretold.*
- *We can experience peace through saving faith in Jesus Christ.*
- *Believers should tell others of all God has done.*

DISCUSS: Guide adults to read and to reflect on the second set of questions on page 36 of the PSG silently. Encourage adults to pair up and to discuss their response to the question. Allow a few minutes for volunteers to share.

REFLECT: Remind adults that the shepherds not only heard the good news but became faithful evangelists, spreading the good news of Jesus's birth. Challenge adults to consider who they might share the good news of Jesus with during the Christmas season.

MEMORIZE: Point out again **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Key Verse: Luke 2:11*). Encourage adults to memorize this verse during the week and to use it as part of their Christmas celebrations in the days ahead.

PRAY: Lead adults in a time of prayer, thanking God for the gift of Jesus and for the good news that He is the Savior, Messiah, and Lord.

AFTER THE SESSION

Follow up the Bible study session with a Christmas card, a text, or an email to all adults who have been a part of your Bible study group during the past few weeks. Send them a Christmas greeting on Christmas Eve encouraging them to review the first set of questions on page 36 of the PSG. Also, let them know you are praying for them as they celebrate the birth of Jesus.

LEADER BLOG



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