



session 1 group study guide

the birth of Jesus Christ

message

The birth of Jesus is a mixture of grandeur and humility. The Son of God, the Savior of humankind, has come to the world. He has all power and all knowledge, but has come to spend time with us. Imagine that! Little ol' us.

At the same time, the King of kings and Lord of lords is born not to the highest-ranking couple in the land but to a lowly carpenter and his pregnant fiancée. And He doesn't come with the pomp and circumstance of a powerful king, but as a little baby, born in a barn surrounded by animals.

Why might Jesus have come to earth in such a quiet way? Why did He come as a baby when He could have come as a king?

Before we dig into the story of Jesus' birth, there are two pieces of the pre-story that we have to understand: (1) prophecies about Jesus' birth, and (2) what is called the "virgin birth."

Jesus' birth foretold

There are many amazing aspects to Jesus' birth, but one of the most astounding is that people had predicted it hundreds of years earlier. The Old Testament has a number of prophecies (predictions of the future) about the events and circumstances surrounding the birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. These prophecies were given to people by God hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus—and, what's more, *they came true*. Let's look at two of these prophecies about Jesus' birth and how they were fulfilled.

1. Look up the following Old Testament Scripture concerning the place of the birth of the Messiah and describe what the prophecy was. Then read the corresponding New Testament passage to find out how it was fulfilled.

Old Testament Prophecy—Micah 5:2

New Testament Fulfillment—Matthew 2:1-6

2. How does King Herod use this prophecy?

3. Look up the following Old Testament Scripture concerning the manner in which the Messiah would be born and describe what the prophecy was. Then read the corresponding New Testament passage to find out how it was fulfilled.

Old Testament Prophecy—Isaiah 7:14

New Testament Fulfillment—Matthew 1:18-23

4. How are Mary and Joseph involved in the fulfillment of this prophecy?

the virgin birth

This second prophecy listed above begins to talk about another important aspect of this story: the virgin birth of Jesus. To refresh your memory, Mary and Joseph were engaged to be married. Then Mary received a visit from an angel who told her that she was going to become pregnant and give birth to God's Son, Jesus Christ. So she wasn't married yet; she was a virgin, and yet she was going to give birth to the Son of God. Here's Mary's account of this event from Luke 1:30-38:

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

1. How does Mary react to the news of this incredible event?

2. What does this tell us about the kind of person Mary was?

While Mary may have demonstrated incredible faith and calmness, her fiancé, Joseph, initially didn't take the news so well. Read Joseph's account in Matthew 1:18-25:

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us."

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

3. What was Joseph's initial reaction?

4. What made him change his mind?

5. What do we learn about the kind of person Joseph is in these passages?

dig

Now let's read through the story of Jesus' birth. The events of his birth are told in two Gospels in the New Testament: Matthew and Luke. We'll read the account of the birth of Jesus found in Luke 2:1-7. As you read, keep the following questions in mind: (1) Why were Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem? (2) What do you think Mary was thinking as she prepared to give birth?

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2:1-7).

1. After you have read these verses, take a moment to write down any questions that you might have.

2. We can see God's hand in every aspect of Jesus' birth. The prophecies said that the Messiah would be born in the town of Bethlehem, but Joseph and Mary were from Nazareth. How did Joseph and Mary end up in Bethlehem?

3. Although conditions may have been more primitive than today, most babies in Jesus' day were not born in stables next to animals. If God planned this all out, why would He have had His Son born in such meager conditions?

Mary and Joseph get two sets of visitors after the birth of Jesus. The first was a set of shepherds. Continue reading Luke 2:8-20 to hear their story:

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

*"Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."*

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

4. Angels appear to shepherds and tell them about the birth of Jesus. When the shepherds arrive, they find everything exactly as the angel had said. Why might the angel have appeared to a bunch of shepherds? Why not someone important or who had influence? (See verse 17 for help.)

The second visitors are referred to as the “Magi,” the “Wise Men” or the “Three Kings.” Now read the account of their visit as told in Matthew 2:1-12:

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

*“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.”*

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

5. Why were the Magi in Bethlehem?

6. How did the Magi respond to Jesus?

7. The response of the Magi is incredible because not only is Jesus just a little baby at this point, but also because the Magi were a part of another religion. In fact, of all the people God could have chosen, the first people He has visit Jesus are a group of shepherds and three guys from a distant land who were members of a different religion. Why do you think this is?

apply

1. Think about Mary and Joseph. How would you respond if God asked you to do something incredible? If He nudged you to do something that maybe seemed crazy?

2. Think about the Magi. They traveled days and days and hundreds of miles to see Jesus. They endured hardship and difficulties just to see this little baby. How hard are you seeking Jesus in your life?

3. Christmas has become more and more about the presents under the tree and less about the presence of Jesus. How do you and your family strive to keep Jesus the center of the Christmas season?

reflect

1. Read John 3:17. Why was Jesus born on this earth?

2. If Jesus knew His purpose, why would He have come as a little helpless baby? Why not just come down from heaven as a full-grown man?

3. What would have been the impact if Jesus' arrival had received more fanfare? Or if Jesus had been born to a prominent couple? Or if the angels had appeared to rulers and priests instead of shepherds?

meditation



But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid.
I bring you good news of great joy that will be for
all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has
been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."

LUKE 2:10-11