

# Christmas: The Birth of Jesus

## WHAT MAKES JESUS' BIRTH SO SPECIAL?

Focal Verses • LUKE 2:1-17

### Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will RETELL the story of Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem and Jesus' birth, REFLECT on the meaning of the Messiah in contemporary times, and IDENTIFY the saving work of Jesus in the world today.

### In Focus

Brenda knew Christmas was about more than buying gifts for her three children, but it didn't feel good not having the money to do so. She couldn't believe it was Christmas Eve and her checking account was negative. Desperately, she applied for and was turned down for an advance loan. She cried when she learned that the Christmas toy giveaways had just ended. There was nothing left for her to do but tell the kids the truth.

"Tomorrow, there'll be no need to go downstairs and look under the tree," she told them sadly.

Without asking why, her six-year-old son said, "That's okay, Mommy. Jesus is only the gift we need."

That made Brenda cry even harder. On Christmas morning, Brenda's children were all snuggled in bed with her when they heard a knock on the door. There, they found Brenda's mother with a car full of gifts. "I know your mom said you weren't getting anything for Christmas, but I've brought a surprise for all of you."

*How do you think Brenda responded to her mother's gifts? Do you think it made her want to worship God? While no gift can compare to Jesus, make sure you remember to worship Him this Christmas.*

SCAN FOR VIDEO



### Keep in Mind

"And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7, KJV).

## Focal Verses

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**KJV** **Luke 2:1** And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.

2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, 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, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

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### The People, Places, and Times

**Joseph.** A righteous man from David's lineage, Joseph lived in Nazareth in Galilee. When he found out that Mary, his fiancée, was pregnant, he initially planned to end their relationship. However, after receiving communication from an angel, he learned that Mary was carrying a child conceived by the Holy Spirit. Joseph decided to stay with Mary and raise the child.

**Mary, the virgin.** The mother of Christ, the wife of Joseph, modeled faith for the church—the faith that realized the birth of Christ in her life and fostered her discipleship. Mary's faith was belief

and trust that lead to total dependence on God and then burst into activity, producing a life of service.

### Background

At the exact time Joseph and Mary were settling, waiting for the arrival of their firstborn child, Rome made a decree for a regional census. With Mary so close to her due date, the couple must have wondered how they would make the 90-mile trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem. But God was working behind the scenes to fulfill His promise that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem, the City of David. What better way to get His

parents there than by a decree requiring the couple to return to their hometowns to pay taxes?

Homecomings are celebrated with much fanfare, but not this one. The census caused Bethlehem to be so overpopulated that every inn was decorated with “No Vacancy” signs. Breathtaking contractions caused Mary to stop at the only place she could find to deliver her son—a stable.

### At-A-Glance

1. Going Back (Luke 2:1–6)
2. Coming Forth (vv. 7–12)
3. Spreading Out (vv. 13–17)

### In Depth

#### 1. Going Back (Luke 2:1–6)

Joseph and Mary may have prepared a place for the baby in their home, picked out the baby’s outfit, and met numerous times with the Hebrew midwives in preparation for the big day. Then Caesar issued a decree: every man had to go to his hometown to be taxed.

This seemingly random tax was all a part of God’s plan, as Bethlehem held a special place in Scripture. It was King David’s hometown and was where the expected Messiah was to come from (Micah 5:2; cf. Matthew 2:1). The decree caused two people living in Nazareth to journey to Bethlehem in a prophecy-fulfilling historical moment. But, how in the world would they make a three-day journey to Bethlehem and get back so Mary could deliver their child in the comfort of their own home? What a dilemma!

When the couple got to Bethlehem, Mary’s contractions began. With no room in the family guest room or local inns, the couple was forced to seek shelter in an animal pen. In a stall, the first witnesses to the Messiah’s birth were animals.

#### 2. Coming Forth (Luke 2:7–12)

A manger seemed strange, but it was all they had. Mary wrapped Jesus tightly in a cloth.

Considering many things in the stall for use as a bed, she settled upon a feeding trough.

While the Messiah and His parents slept, some shepherds were in a field keeping watch over their sheep. The evening started out as routine as any other—the shepherds brought the sheep back to the fold. They ensured none of the flock was missing by passing them “under the rod” (a counting mechanism) as they entered the enclosure entrance. If any of the sheep had strayed, the shepherds would have searched until it was found, which would have made for a long night!

Then, out of nowhere, an angel appeared to the shepherds, causing them to be afraid. However, the angel brought them the good news of great joy, telling them about Jesus’ birth and inviting them to see for themselves.

#### 3. Spreading Out (Luke 2:13–17)

If the shepherds had any doubts about what they had seen and heard, the host of praising angels was enough to make them eager to check it out. They quickly went to Bethlehem. Imagine how they felt when they came upon Mary, Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. It must have been wonderful to find that God’s words are true, that something is just as God told you it would be. As witnesses, they had to tell somebody, anybody, and everybody! Not just about a child who was born or the hope of expectant parents, but the Good News of the birth of the Savior of all people.

### Search the Scriptures

1. What caused Joseph and Mary to return to Bethlehem, according to Luke 2:1–4?
2. Whom did the angels tell to see Jesus according to verses 8–12?

### Discuss the Meaning

1. God used a census to fulfill His promise. How does God use human actions to meet the needs of His people?
2. How do you respond to the Good News that God keeps His promises?

## Liberating Lesson

We live in a society where people often believe that obtaining God's promises should be easy. They may say, "What God has for me is for me" – until they face hardship and then doubt whether they heard God correctly. However, promises from God can be accompanied by challenges. The path from Egypt led straight to the Red Sea. Giants inhabited the Promised Land. Jesus' birth was affected by a census, causing a series of unfortunate events. If we want to witness the promises of God fulfilled, we must learn to persist and endure.

## Application for Activation

What promise has God made to you? List the obstacles you're enduring, and remember Mary and Joseph. Know that each obstacle gets you closer to the promise. Praise God in advance for the birth of the promise He's entrusted to you.

## Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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### Sources:

Potter, D. S. "Life, Death and Entertainment in the Roman Empire." *UNRV History*. <http://www.unrv.com/book-review/life-death-entertainment.php> (accessed September 6, 2024 ).  
Smith, William. *Smith's Bible Dictionary*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2000. 137, 322–23, 386, 617–18.

## Say It Correctly

Bethlehem. **BETH**-li-hem.

Nazareth. **NA**-za-reth.

Cyrenius. **CY**-ren-ee-us.

## Daily Bible Readings

### DAY 113

1 Chronicles 9–11

Psalms 46:1–7

### DAY 114

1 Chronicles 12–14

Psalms 46:8–11

### DAY 115

1 Chronicles 15–17

Psalms 47

### DAY 116

1 Chronicles 18–21

Psalms 48:1–7

### DAY 117

1 Chronicles 22–24

Psalms 48:8–14

### DAY 118

1 Chronicles 25–27

Psalms 49:1–4

### DAY 119

1 Chronicles 28–29

Psalms 49:5–11