

JOIN THE STORY

Lesson 25

Unto Us a Child is Born

Story Focus:

Christ's entrance into our world is an exciting part of God's ongoing Story to redeem humanity and save all who believe.

Student Tension:

Have we allowed God to enter into our hearts?

Bible Reference:

Luke 2:1-20

Resources:

- _ *Father of the Bride 2* video or DVD, VHS or DVD player, and TV; or special guest
- _ Paper, pens, candy prizes
- _ *In A Shepherd's Shoes* handout
- _ Art supplies, clay
- _ 3x5 cards, pens
- _ *Charlie Brown Christmas* video
- _ Spontaneous Melodrama, *One Starry Night*
- _ *What Child is This?* Christmas carol
- _ Candy canes

LESSON SUMMARY

It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year

Christmas is probably a favorite time of year for most of your students. For starters, they love getting out of school. They enjoy getting into the spirit of the season itself and our culture certainly has a fascination with it. Part of the excitement has to do with the giving and receiving of gifts. Part of it has to do with old and new beginnings. At the center of this chaotic and exciting season, however, is a story so simple and yet so significant that it's easily lost in all the busyness.

Just like you, your students are busy, they are preoccupied, and during this season they are sometimes focused on the wrong things. They need to hear the cry of Baby Jesus. Away from the Christmas lights and away from the prepackaged production, they need to see the rustic manger. They need to hear the angels' voices and they need to realize that something special has happened.

Your students need this lesson to cut through all their prepackaged ideas about the perfect gift and realize that Jesus is the perfect Gift. They need the silence of a shepherd's night to declare that something is different this year; that something has changed. They need to know that there is more to this season than the stressed out, "only four shopping days left" mentality, even though it may be championed by their families. This lesson can be an awakening for them, much like the awakening a bunch of shepherds received when their quiet, average, normal night was interrupted by a host of heavenly angels.

In Those Days . . .

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree. It is the birth heard 'round the world. Even Caesar Augustus hears the sound, and has a hand in the location of this little baby's birth. Because everyone has to go to his hometown to register, Caesar unwittingly has a hand in the prophecy being fulfilled (Micah 5:1-3) that the Savior from the House of David will be born in Bethlehem. Because Mary is a virgin, when she gives birth she fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 that a virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and call Him, "Immanuel," meaning "God with us."

She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger. It is difficult to think about this scene without a common picture of the nativity popping into our minds. Tradition would suggest that the cozy wooden manger we picture is actually a feeding trough, probably carved out of stone. The quaint little stable that we imagine is more of a cave-like dwelling with a lean-to roof. This shelter is perhaps just enough to keep out the cold of the night, but not much more. The Savior of the world begins His life in a pretty ordinary, if not simple way.

An angel of the Lord appeared to them . . . and they were terrified! We might think, "If an angel appeared to me, I would break out into a praise and worship chorus, not fall down in fear." But we must realize that up until this point in their lives, things are pretty ordinary for these shepherds. On this night, they are doing what they have done every night for a long time. They are keeping watch, protecting sheep, and warming their hands by a fire. Suddenly, the night sky lights up and their lives change forever.

"I bring you good news of great joy for ALL people." As these words leave the angels' lips, a message is sent not only to those present, but to all those to come. This child is a gift to everyone. This child is the hope of the world. This child is Christ the Lord. This child isn't just for the elite, the rich, or the well-connected. This is a child for the common people, announced first to a group of common shepherds, hard at work in the fields. And if that message isn't enough, a large group of angels shows up to further amplify the fact that this ordinary, manger birth is the glory of God, and the peace of the earth.

And on earth, peace to men. Peace is a concept that many thought would come through the Roman Empire, but that which Caesar can't bring comes through this little baby. The word peace has some connection to the Jewish concept of shalom which means, "wholeness," or "right standing with God." Jesus comes to bring peace between God and humankind.

When they had seen him, they spread the word. When the shepherds find Jesus for themselves, they are compelled to share what they have seen. Instead of sighing "ho-hum" and going back to their sheep, these men set off to tell what has happened to them. They have had an unusual experience, to say the least. As all these events unfold, Luke draws our attention back to Mary, who *treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.* Maybe this is a good indication of how we ought to respond to this incredible story.

All Too Familiar?

For some of your students, understanding the significance of the birth of Jesus Christ will be natural. Teaching about Christ's birth yet another time, will be a challenging task for any teacher seeking to make an impact. Most people have heard the story, but the question we must ask is, "How can I teach this familiar story so that it will engage my students in a new way?"

Perhaps the best place to start is with your own heart. How do you hear the story of Christ, as if it is the first time you've heard it? How will you see this story with new eyes, peering deep into the wisdom found within? What new approaches will you use to teach this old story? How you personally prepare to receive this story will directly impact your ability to communicate its truth to your students, many of whom have heard it as many times as you have.

MY STORY

Lamaze Class 101

Show the scene from *Father of the Bride 2*, when the mother and daughter, pregnant together, head to the hospital for their births. George, father and husband, has taken too much medication, which makes this scene even more hilarious. Stop the scene when they get to the hospital. Then ask the following questions:

What is the first thing that comes to your mind after watching this scene?

What does this scene suggest about child birthing?

What things do people typically do to get ready for a birth?

How might this preparation change the way we approach Jesus Christ's birth?

You might also want to invite a new or expectant mother/father to come to class and share their plans for the new baby and how it has changed their lives.

Nativity Recall

Divide your students into two teams and give each team a piece of paper and a pen. Have each team assign a scribe. Instruct them to list the characters found in a typical Nativity scene. Give them 2 minutes to complete their list. Use the master list below as a key. Provide some mini-chocolate bars or candy for the team that lists the most correctly.

Master list: Baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, angels, shepherds, manger, shelter of some kind, a star, cows, horses, sheep, straw, 3 wise men, gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

TRANSITION: The Christmas Story is pretty familiar to all of us, which makes it hard to hear it anew. Let's try to imagine what it was like to be a part of that amazing night so long ago.

Creative Option

As an option for the Nativity Recall activity, show the scene from *A Charlie Brown Christmas* where Linus is the narrator. This is a fun way of looking at how the Christmas story is told. Use the video to set up the GOD'S STORY journal exercise below.

30-Second SkillBuilder

The key to good teaching is creativity. The key to creativity is preparation. Once you begin to prepare the lesson it begins to become a part of you and not just some words and ideas from a book. Only then will creativity help you be the kind of teacher you've always wanted to be. Prepare early in the week, even if it is just reading through the lesson quickly. Do it early so that your mind has time to think of creative possibilities. Later in the week, dreaming can begin. Dreaming about a lesson is the process of taking yourself out to the creative edge where almost anything goes. It is asking, "What is the most unexpected way to teach this truth?" Dream away!!!

GOD'S STORY

In A Shepherd's Shoes

Before class, copy enough *In A Shepherd's Shoes* handouts for each of your students. The handout asks them to write a journal entry as if they were one of the shepherds in the fields the night that the angels visited them and told them of the birth of Jesus Christ. The story is recorded in Luke 2:8-20. After a few minutes of journaling, allow students to share what they wrote. Then say, **How would Christmas**

change if we were more like the shepherds who were there on that night and saw first hand what God was doing through Baby Jesus? What would it take for that to happen?

Jesus' Birth Today

Divide your students into groups of three. Provide for each group a piece of paper and a pen. If your class is large, use larger groups or add more groups. Instruct your students to rewrite the Christmas story found in Luke 2:1-20, as if it happened in today's culture. Remind them to pay specific attention to the details of the story, such as translating who they think would be the "shepherds" of the day, and what the "manger" in today's world might look like. If time permits, allow groups to share their stories with the rest of the class.

TRANSITION: It is pretty hard for us to fathom the impact of Christ's birth on the people who witnessed it—and today it is sometimes difficult to see the importance of the story when it is covered in shiny Christmas wrapping paper. Yet thousands of years later, we can still respond to the story in some way that the shepherds and other amazed witnesses responded.

Creative Option

Use the melodrama *One Starry Night*, printed at the end of this lesson, to have some fun with the Christmas story and get your students thinking in the right direction.

GodTalk

Isaiah the prophet uses four names to describe the Messiah:

Wonderful Counselor (A set apart, unparalleled giver of wisdom)

Mighty God (God himself)

Everlasting Father (A timeless God, a father God)

Prince of Peace (A governor of peace, of rightness with God)

Jesus fulfilled all these characteristics with His coming.

OUR STORY

From the Manger to the Cross

Ask your class, **What, if any difference does this birth make in our lives today?** Then ask them to respond without words. Provide modeling clay, art paper, pencils, pens and crayons. Ask them to draw or model whatever they feel God is trying to tell them through the birth of Jesus Christ. Allow students to share their work with the rest of the class.

A New Kind of Christmas Carol

Give each of your student's three 3x5 cards and a pen. Say, **In the story, *A Christmas Carol*, Ebenezer Scrooge is visited by three ghosts; the ghost of Christmas past, the ghost of Christmas present and the ghost of Christmas future. Each ghost has something specific to show Scrooge about his life for what it has been, what it is and what it will become. Say, If The Angel of Christmas past, Christmas present, and Christmas future came to you, what would they say to you about Christ's birth and how it has affected you in the past, today, and what it will mean to you in the future. Have the students assign one "Angel" to each of their cards and respond accordingly. If there is time, allow students to share their work with the class.**

Creative Option

Close the lesson by singing the Christmas carol, “What Child is This? Or hand each student a candy cane and share the history of it provided below.

Soul Food

Use the Christmas tradition of Christmas caroling to illustrate how we are called to take the story of Jesus Christ into the world. Remind your class that there are two times of the year that people are most receptive to the gospel of Jesus Christ, Easter and Christmas. (Consider doing this even if you are using this lesson at a different time of the year.)

The Candy Cane

In the late 1800’s a candy maker in Indiana wanted to express the meaning of Christmas through a symbol made of candy. He came up with the idea of bending one of his candy sticks into the shape of a candy cane. He incorporated several symbols of Christ’s love and sacrifice into the candy cane. First, he used a plain white peppermint stick. The color white symbolizes the purity and sinless nature of Jesus. Next, he added three small stripes to symbolize the pain inflicted upon Jesus before His death on the cross. The three stripes also represent the Holy Trinity. He added a bold stripe to represent the blood Jesus shed for mankind. When you look at the crook on top, it looks like a shepherd’s staff because Jesus is the shepherd of man. If you turn it upside down, it becomes the letter “J,” symbolizing the first letter in Jesus’ name. The candy maker made these candy canes for Christmas, so everyone would remember what Christmas is all about.