Jesus Is Born December 19, 2021

**Bible Verses:** Luke 2:1-20

**Spark Story Bible:** pages 212 to 217

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Overall Lesson Takeaways

* **Jesus has come for everyone, whether rich/poor or powerful/weak.**

More than any other gospel, Luke routinely notes that Jesus has come for everyone and not just a select few. We touched on the Jewish-Gentile division last week, but Luke is clear that Jesus has come for the poor, the meek, and the lonely as much as the rich, the powerful, and those of high social class. By recounting that God sent an angel to visit shepherds rather than the political leaders of the day that begin this passage, or by having the savior of the world born in a stable because there was no room in an inn, Luke is reminding us that God’s love is all encompassing. Our world tends to privilege those of high social standing and influence – but in God’s kingdom, there must be no hierarchy amongst us. We are all beloved children of God, and we are all the recipients of God’s greatest gift to us.

* **Enjoying peace in a time when we’re normally on the move!**

I have always been struck by how every single person in the Christmas story is on the move: Mary and Joseph travelling to Bethlehem, angels visiting shepherds in the fields, shepherds visiting the manger, wise men coming from the East. At yet, at the center of the story, the baby Jesus arrives and for a few short verses everything is still. *The shepherds share what they have heard about Jesus with Mary and Joseph, and Mary treasured those words in her heart.* Of course, everyone eventually ends up back in motion again: the shepherds return to their fields, Jesus is brought to Jerusalem, and by the end of the second chapter Jesus has grown up. But, to me, part of the joy of this story is the chance to pause like Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds, and to marvel with joy and wonder at the incredible gift of the baby Jesus.

* **“To you is born this day in the city of David a savior”**

These words spoken by the angel in Luke 2:11 sum up the joy of Christmas nicely – even if we’re reading this passage a few days before Christmas! Jesus’ birth in the manger is at once both shocking and comforting – that God would choose to come into the world as a tiny baby in such humble circumstances, while also being the Savior, Messiah, and the Son of God. But Jesus’ birth isn’t just about what he means for our world; it’s what he means for all of us. As Luke 2:11 says, “to you is born this day” – and that goes for all of us. God sent Jesus into the world for every single one of us, both to teach us that we are loved and to teach us how to love better. For that, we are incredibly grateful and thankful in this season!

Checking In

**Before the reading:**

* **Check in with the kids – welcoming any newcomers warmly.**
	+ Younger kids: What is a gift that you’re really hoping to get?
	+ Older kids: Highs and Lows from their past week
* **What do you think the stable where Jesus was born would have looked like? Sounded like? Smelled like??**

Bible Lesson / Discussion

**Reading the Bible:**

* Today, we are reading about the Baby Jesus’ birth, along with angels visiting a group of shepherds to tell them the good news!
* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**
	+ You’ll need to screen share the passage for the day in Zoom.
	+ Feel free to stop and ask questions during the reading, if helpful.
	+ Afterwards, take time to explore what that passage might mean, and know there's no one *correct* way to read these passages!

**Questions About the Passage** (see next page for PreK/K questions)

* How do you think the shepherds felt when they were visited by the angel?
* Why do you think God chose to come into the world as a baby? Think about how people usually act around babies – do they act differently?
* Why do you think God chose to come into the world in a stable manger? Would it feel different if Jesus was born in a palace, or a mansion?

**Connections to Our Lives**

* The shepherds heard the news about Jesus’ birth from angels… how do we get news or hear messages today? If Jesus was born and you were in charge of getting the word out, what would you do to tell people?
* Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds were an unlikely gathering – but a beautiful one too. Who do you usually spend Christmas with? What will Christmas look like for you and your family this year?

**Biblical/Church Connections**

* The fourth Advent candle that we light is the candle of “love” – why do you think this is the last candle that we light on our wreath before the white “Christ” candle at the center? Why is love so important?

**Alternate Preschool and K/1st Questions**

Younger ages, particularly those in our preschool class, may have a hard time discussing the biblical text for very long (if at all). My hope is that these questions (and especially the activity) can help with engagement!

**Opening Questions**

* How hard has it been to wait for Christmas to arrive? What are you most looking forward to about Christmas Eve and Christmas Day?
* Who are you going to be with on Christmas?
* Are there any presents that you’re really hoping to get? Are there any presents that you’re really excited to give someone else?

**Fun Activity**

* Today is the fourth and final Sunday of Advent – the Sunday we light the purple candle of love! Every time I read the story of Jesus’ birth, I think about how much God loves us, and how Jesus helps us to love one another – and so we look forward to celebrating Jesus’ birthday on Christmas!
* Our Bible stories this Advent have had lots of different people and places, so I thought it would be fun to try to play a game where I try to draw pictures of them, and you guess who or what I’m drawing.
* (You’ll need to screen share the “Whiteboard” to play this, and have the kids unmuted so they can shout their guesses)
* Some examples of things to draw:
	+ Shepherds/Sheep
	+ Angels
	+ Baby Jesus in Manger
	+ Wise Men
	+ Mary and Joseph

**Bible Discussion/Questions**

* How do you think the shepherds felt when they were visited by the angel? Do you think they were excited to go see the Baby Jesus?
* What do you think the stable where Jesus was born would have looked like? Sounded like? Smelled like??
* Why do you think God chose to come into the world as a baby? Think about how people usually act around babies – do they act differently?

People of Faith

In addition to reading our weekly Bible story, I'd love for our older grade school students to learn more about people whose lives were changed by their faith in Jesus. We'll lift up a new person each Sunday, trying to connect their story to our Bible passage as much as possible!

**Justo Gonzalez**

As we remember the birth of Jesus today (and obviously later this week!), we also pause to think about all of the ways that the light Jesus brought into the world began to be shared – and one of the great voices that has helped to capture that growth of the early church is the historian Justo Gonzalez.

Born in Havana, Cuba in 1937, Gonzalez was heavily involved in the Methodist church growing up – writing that early on he decided that he would become an evangelist to help the thousands that he saw in the slums of Havana. Rather than becoming a pastor, though, those around Gonzalez soon recognized that he was an absolutely brilliant student. By the time he was 20, he had earned three bachelor’s degrees from a local colleges – eventually moving to the United States where he studied at Yale University, becoming the youngest person ever to receive a historical theology doctorate from Yale at the age of 24.

Unfortunately, Gonzales’ studies were taking place in the midst of great tensions between Cuba and the United States, so he was not allowed to return home – instead becoming a professor in Puerto Rico, followed by professorships in Emory University and Columbia Seminary in Georgia.

It was during this time that he began writing the two books that he is best known for: *A History of Christian Thought* and *The Story of Christianity*. Both works covered an absolutely massive span of historical data – with *The Story of Christianity* covering all 2,000 years of Christian history. What made this work so remarkable, though, is that Gonzalez took care to include the stories of Christians from outside the “West” – helping to maintain a sense of global Christianity rather than merely a history of the Catholic Church and a Euro-centric focus. For Gonzalez, including voices long silenced or forgotten was a key piece of what he loved about history – and his ability to research and share these stories have helped thousands of seminarians and professors expand beyond a narrow vision of what Christian history looks like.

Crafts / Activities

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**Jesus Is Born 3D Nativity**

**(Ages 5+, 10 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* [Template](https://biblecraftsbyjenny.weebly.com/uploads/1/0/1/2/101295324/nativity_stand_up_barn_pdf.pdf)
* Scissors
* Glue/Tape
* Pen/Pencil/Crayons

Instructions:

* After printing, encourage kids to color all of the pieces before cutting them out and assembling them (preferably with tape).

**Jesus Is Born Comic Book**

**(Ages 5+, 5-10 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Crayons

Instructions:

* This worksheet will ask kids to draw several scenes from the Christmas story in the various panels, using the format of comic books.

**Jesus Is Born Maze**

**(Ages 7+, 5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Crayons

Instructions:

* This maze is definitely on the tougher end of things, but any child who is a maze enthusiast should be pretty into it!

Biblical Background – Jesus Is Born[[1]](#footnote-1)

Although we typically spend this section looking at the historical context of our passages each week, the context of this Luke 2:1-20 is essentially the same as the past few Sundays… I encourage you to check out December 6’s background if you’d like that sort of analysis. Instead, I want to take a little time to explain something that is occasionally a point of curiosity among kids and adults alike: why do Matthew and Luke’s accounts of Jesus’ birth feel so different?

While these two accounts typically blur together – both in our pageants and our imaginations – when you sit down and read the first two chapters of both Matthew and Luke there isn't exactly a lot of overlap between the two. Sure, an angel visits one of Jesus' parents, the family lives in Nazareth because of Joseph, and Jesus is born in Bethlehem of Judea. Other than that, the differences are stark: Matthew focuses on Joseph (genealogy, the angel, going to/from Egypt), Herod, and the Wise Men. Luke focuses on Mary (the angel, Magnificat), Zechariah and Elizabeth, and the shepherds. So, what gives?

The short, easy answer is that Matthew and Luke had different emphases when they were writing their gospels – and many of their favorite themes appear throughout these birth narratives. Matthew – widely thought to have been writing to an audience steeped in Judaism – is interested in the patrilineal line from Joseph stretching back to Abraham, in the ways in which Jesus fulfills Hebrew scriptures, and in portraying Jesus as a new, greater version of Moses who has come to save God's people. Luke – widely thought to have been writing to a Greco-Roman audience – is interested in the "Great Reversal" (i.e. the ways in which society would be upended by Jesus' arrival), and how the definition of "God's people" was expanding beyond Israel. Although the two accounts are clearly different, the only major conflict seems to be Matthew and Luke's genealogies for Jesus (compare Matthew 1 with the end of Luke 3). In the end, we'll never really know how much Matthew or Luke were aware of one another's sources about Jesus' life – these differing accounts may boil down to different oral traditions that had been passed down, or merely to each gospel writer carefully selecting sources that underscored what Jesus' life and ministry meant to them and those they were writing to.

1. Your ability to share this info with kids will vary depending on their age – this section is mainly written for teachers and parents to learn a bit more about the background to each week's passage! [↑](#footnote-ref-1)