

07

THE SON HAS COME

LEADER GUIDE



the **GOSPEL**PROJECT.

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ADULTS



SPRING | 2026

A SON WAS BORN FOR YOU

**“A CHILD WILL BE BORN FOR US, A SON WILL BE GIVEN TO US.”
(ISAIAH 9:6)**

A Son will be given—a gift, a present. Isaiah lived in days shadowed by gloom, but God granted a flicker of hope, a ray of light. A Son would be given, a descendant of King David would come, an eternal kingdom would be established—one marked by justice and righteousness.

Yet God’s people were shrouded in gloom for their lack of justice and righteousness. Their idolatry, their sin, brought God’s judgment and exile to the nations. They were meant to be a light to the nations; instead, they were nearly snuffed out. Still, a flicker of hope, a ray of light—a Child would be born. Through many dark days and years of God’s silence, the flicker remained until the Son at last was given.

“She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). God presents His gift, the Son. And this Son answers the question, He solves the problem of their gloom: He will save His people from their sins. Their lack of justice and righteousness will be made up in His fullness. Their idolatry and sin will be done away with in His sacrifice. The flicker rages; the ray bursts forth; the Light has come to His people—and more.

“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: Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord’” (Luke 2:10-11).

The present, the gift, is for all the people. The Savior from sins is for all the people; the Messiah-King is for all the people. Repent of your sin and believe in Jesus, who died for sins and rose from the dead that you may have life. “See, now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation!” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

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THE EDITOR

When Covid came and shut down societies, the world changed in many drastic ways. Society learned to work remotely, online ordering dramatically increased, worship services were livestreamed, and even taking communion was revolutionized.

And if we thought 2020 was a year that changed the world, how much more was the year Jesus came onto the scene? Though only a few knew at the time, Jesus entered the world fulfilling prophecies of old, and He came ushering in a new kingdom—one of peace, forgiveness, and salvation to those who believed.

The Messiah, the Anointed One, God Himself in human flesh, had come, not to set up a throne here on earth but to set Himself on the throne of our hearts. Humbly He was born and grew in wisdom. He was baptized, tempted, and began His ministry in a way like no other.

He brought forth a new kingdom, talked about a new birth, and commanded a new way of living. And when He called, people followed. And early on, He spoke of His crucifixion, but no one understood at the time. He was on a mission with the purpose of saving humanity through His own sacrifice.

Jesus, thus, is our everything. He is our Savior and Lord. And through Him, we are gifted life evermore. Without Jesus, we are in darkness. But because of Jesus, we are forever in the light. Because of God's love for us, He sent Jesus. And the world and our lives are forever changed.

Y Bonesteele

Team Leader

The Gospel Project for Adults



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The Gospel Project®

Adult Leader Guide
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WHAT BIBLE STUDY LEADERS CAN LEARN FROM FLIGHT ATTENDANTS

By G. Dwayne McCrary



“May I have your attention please?”

I would guess the job of a flight attendant feels thankless at times. People board the plane expecting to be greeted and acknowledged. We aren't concerned about the flight attendants because we're focused on our travel plans and schedules. We expect them to hear our requests for coffee and deliver it exactly as we asked. We complain about things beyond their control, like flight delays and full planes.

Flight attendants, however, serve a vital role in our travel experience. I even contend that if we take time to observe them as they work, there is much we can learn. Let's consider some of the actions of flight attendants that parallel what we do as Bible study leaders. At least four similarities can be drawn to help us lead our groups.

PASSENGERS BOARD WITH OTHER THINGS ON THEIR MIND

When people board a plane, the last thing on their mind is how they will interact with the flight attendants. Passengers may be consumed with how their baggage will fit in the overhead compartment, how long the flight will be, or the notes they need to review in preparation for a meeting. Flight attendants must get the attention of their passengers to give directions about seat belts, inflating flotation vests, and locating the exits.

When people arrive for our Bible study groups, Bible study might be the last thing on their mind. Issues at work or in their families, events in the news, or the person who got their usual parking spot may be occupying their thoughts. Just like

flight attendants, we need to direct their attention to the lesson. As individuals arrive, we can pose a question or invite them to participate in an activity to help them focus on the study.



*Every person deserves to be heard,
moved forward in their understanding of God's truth,
and challenged to grow in their faith.*

NOT EVERY PASSENGER HAS FLOWN BEFORE

For some passengers, this may be their first flight. They don't know where the seat numbers are located, that they need to face the wheels out when placing their bags in the overhead bins, or how to adjust the air vent. Some things can be figured out by watching others, but not everything. Sometimes the flight attendant needs to point out the button that reclines the seat or must explain the purpose of the bag in the seat pouch.

In much the same way, some who attend our groups have never been in a Bible study before. Even if they have been in a group at a different church, how our church and groups work may be vastly different. We can help these individuals by providing them with a Personal Study Guide and directing them to the first page of that week's session. We also can introduce them to others in the group who can walk with them for the day.

PASSENGERS EXPECT TO BE TREATED FAIRLY

If one passenger on our row gets extra snacks, we expect extra snacks too! Regular flyers don't wear badges or tags that reveal the airfare they paid or how often they fly, so the flight attendant must treat everyone like a frequent flyer or as if they paid a premium price to be there.

The people in our Bible study groups should be treated fairly as well. We value each person in the room regardless of their attendance pattern, position in the church or community, or stage of spiritual maturity. Every person deserves to be heard, moved forward in their understanding of God's truth, and challenged to grow in their faith.

PASSENGERS WILL TRAVEL WITH YOU AGAIN BASED IN PART ON HOW YOU INTERACT WITH THEM

Travelers likely will not have an opportunity to visit with the pilot, the person guiding the plane to the gate, or the baggage handlers. Their only guaranteed interactions are with the person checking tickets and the flight attendants. Therefore, travelers will equate the flight attendants with the rest of the company and decide whether to use that carrier again based on that interaction alone.

Individuals who attend our groups may not visit with the pastor or other church leaders every week. Those attending for the first time or giving our church one more try will base their decision to return in part on how we interact with them. We have the privilege of representing the values of our churches and our Savior to the people who attend our groups, giving them a reason to return.

The next time you fly, thank the flight attendants for giving you an example of how to lead a Bible study group. We can use these lessons to be better Bible study leaders.

G. Dwayne McCrary is the manager of the adult ongoing Bible study team at Lifeway and a frequent flyer. His newest book, *Marked by Prayer*, can be found at Lifeway.com.

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

The Gospel Project for Adults aspires to point to the gospel of Jesus Christ through weekly group Bible studies and additional resources that show how God's plan of redemption unfolds throughout all of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. This curriculum provides theological yet practical studies that immerse your group in the **STORY** of the gospel, helping to develop a gospel **CULTURE** that leads to gospel **MISSION**.

GOSPEL STORY

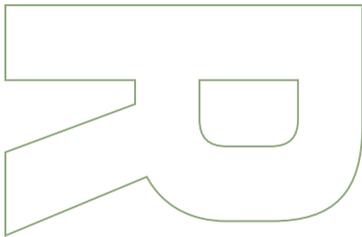
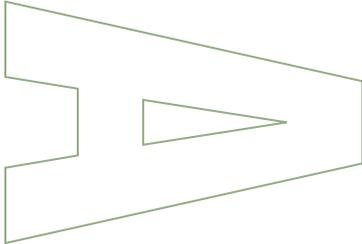
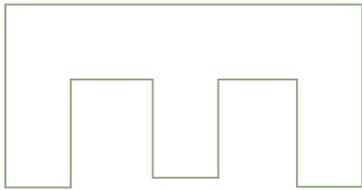
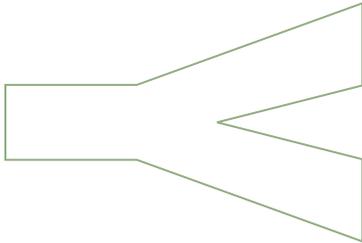
Our aim is to help people see the storyline of Scripture, the thread from the beginning to end, that weaves God's plan to rescue and redeem His creation through His Son, Jesus Christ.

GOSPEL CULTURE

Our hope is that the message of the gospel saturates our understanding of Christ, increasing our joy in Him, helping doubters become believers who become declarers of the gospel.

GOSPEL MISSION

Our desire is to empower believers to live on mission, declaring the good news of the gospel in word and deed for God's glory and the growth of His kingdom.



VOL 01:
CREATION AND COVENANT

(Genesis; Job)

Fall 2024

Unit 01: Foundations

Unit 02: God's Promises

Unit 03: Struggles of Faith

VOL 02:
LAW AND LIFE

(Exodus–Deuteronomy)

Winter 2024–25

Unit 04: God's Miraculous Work

Unit 05: God's Character

Unit 06: Humanity's Selfishness

VOL 03:
LAND AND LOSS

(Joshua–1 Samuel)

Spring 2025

Unit 07: God Is for His People

Unit 08: God Delivers His People

Unit 09: God Cares for His People

VOL 04:
FOOLISHNESS AND WISDOM

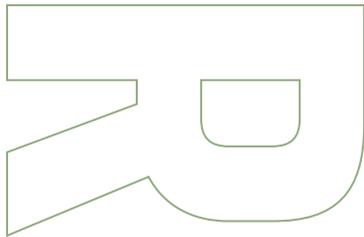
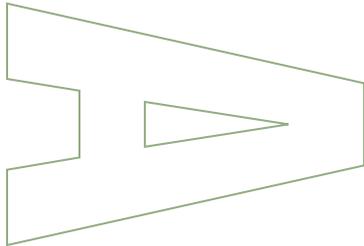
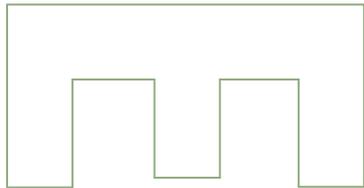
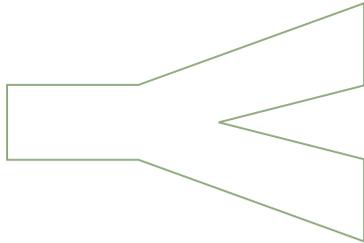
(1 Samuel–1 Kings; Wisdom Literature)

Summer 2025

Unit 10: The Foolishness of God's People

Unit 11: Everything Belongs to the Lord

Unit 12: The Need for Wisdom



VOL 05:
DIVISION AND DEFIANCE

(1 Kings–2 Chronicles; The Prophets)

Fall 2025

Unit 13: Divisions

Unit 14: Renewal

Unit 15: Decline

VOL 06:
PROPHETS AND PROVISION

(The Prophets; Ezra–Esther)

Winter 2025–26

Unit 16: God in the Exile

Unit 17: God in the Restoration

Unit 18: God in the Return

VOL 07:
THE SON HAS COME

(The Gospels)

Spring 2026

Unit 19: The Arrival

Unit 20: The Preparation

Unit 21: The Ministry

VOL 08:
THE SON HAS AUTHORITY

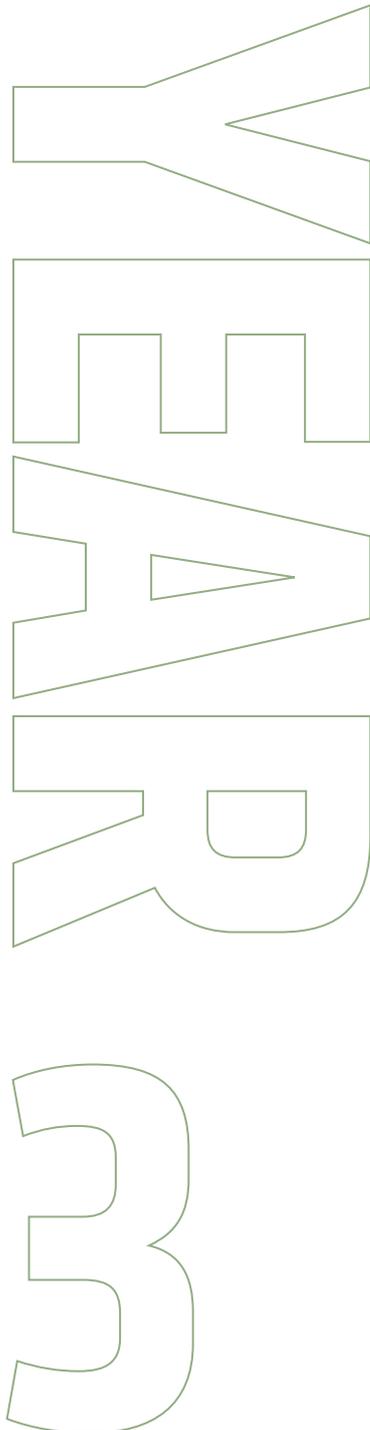
(The Gospels)

Summer 2026

Unit 22: Responses to Jesus

Unit 23: The Way of Jesus

Unit 24: The Teachings of Jesus



VOL 09:
THE SON HAS TRUTH

(The Gospels)

Fall 2026

Unit 25: The Truth of His Power

Unit 26: The Truth of His Actions

Unit 27: The Truth of His Kingdom

VOL 10:
THE SON HAS RISEN

(The Gospels; Acts)

Winter 2026–27

Unit 28: The Final Days

Unit 29: Post-Resurrection

Unit 30: The Gospel Spreads

VOL 11:
THE CHURCH HAS A MISSION

(Acts; The Epistles)

Spring 2027

Unit 31: Sharing Truths of the Mission

Unit 32: Living Out the Mission

Unit 33: Christ Focuses Our Mission

VOL 12:
THE CHURCH HAS A FUTURE

(The Epistles; Revelation)

Summer 2027

Unit 34: We Are in Christ

Unit 35: We Are Citizens of Heaven

Unit 36: Jesus

HOW TO USE THE LEADER GUIDE

The Leader Guide is an important tool in your personal and group experience with The Gospel Project for Adults. Here's how to make the most of your time with it:

1) READ THE WORD DAILY

Begin each week by reading the Scriptures according to the Daily Readings. These Bible readings will help you mentally and spiritually prepare for the group experience each week while also building healthy Bible study habits for personal growth. The daily readings will help you understand the context of the Bible story for each week's session and fill in the gaps between sessions. The weekly psalm reading will help you think worshipfully and prayerfully about the story's place in the greater redemptive narrative of the Bible. And the timeline will give you a visual perspective so you can place the Bible story in the larger context of the Bible's storyline.



- **Daily Readings**
- **Chronological Timeline**



TIMELINE

Malachi Prophesies the Messenger to Prepare the Way for the Lord (Malachi 3:1-4)

The Angel Foretells the Birth of John the Baptist to Prepare the Way for the Messiah (Luke 1:5-25)

SESSION STUDY: Jesus Is Born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-20)

The Intertestamental Period (400 Years of God's Silence)

The Angel Foretells the Birth of Jesus, the Son of God (Luke 1:26-56)

Mary and Joseph Take Baby Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:21-39)

Daily Readings

<input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: Matthew 1:1-17	<input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: Luke 2:8-14
<input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: Matthew 1:18-25	<input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: Luke 2:15-20
<input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: Luke 2:1-7	<input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 132



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

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2) STUDY FOR PERSONAL PREPARATION

The Personal Preparation section contains the Scripture passages that will guide you and your group to prepare for Bible study during the week before group time begins. A Bible study prompt will help you engage with the Scripture passage, but encourage your group to do more than what's asked in the prompt. Space is provided for you and your group to add notes and questions and markings that will help you study the passage more deeply and see any nuances about the words and phrases of the Scripture provided. In addition to a brief commentary with thought-provoking questions to help you and your group dig deeper into the text, leader notes will provide you with additional nuggets for understanding the Scriptures. Use this Personal Preparation to experience what your group is experiencing as they study the week prior. Consider what questions, thoughts, or challenges they might have while engaging with the Scripture passages.

- Scripture
- Commentary
- Questions

PERSONAL PREPARATION

**FROM THE LINE OF DAVID, AS PROPHESED,
A SAVIOR WAS BORN (LUKE 2:4-12).**

Circle the locations mentioned in the passage.

4 Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, 5 to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. 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."

A Roman census caused Joseph and Mary to travel far away from home as Mary was late into her miraculous pregnancy (vv. 1-3). Likely the rush of people coming into Bethlehem for that same census put the couple in a bind for a place to spend the night. The best place available to them as Mary gave birth was where animals were kept. The Child who would be called Immanuel, truly "God with us" (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:22-23), was born in the most humble place imaginable. The promised King from the line of David was not placed in a cradle in a palace but in a manger.

What can we see about the character of Jesus from His birth in a lowly stable?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

GOD THE SON: Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ, He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin.

Key Concept: The good news is meant to be shared.

LEADER NOTE: The humility seen in the birth of Christ points to the servant character of Jesus, which is reflected in the good news. Jesus "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Jesus would lay down His life to die on the cross so that all who would believe in Him would be forgiven of their sins and receive eternal life with Him (John 3:16).

Continuing the humble circumstances of Jesus's birth, the good news of His arrival was shared first with a lowly class of people. Shepherds were not viewed in a positive light in ancient Israel, yet some shepherds in the fields were the first to hear about the birth of Jesus, and that from an angel sent by the Lord.

What the angel said to the shepherds clues us in to the purpose of God in sending His Son to earth in this humble fashion. The news of the Messiah-King is "good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10). The Messiah did not come to save just the regal and powerful, nor did He come just to save the people of Israel. Rather, He came into this world to lowly parents in a lowly stable and visited by lowly shepherds to save all people—whether Jew or Gentile—who recognize their lowly status as sinners in need of a Savior. And the angel confirmed his words with a specific sign highlighting the Messiah's humility: the shepherds would find the Savior lying in a manger.

LEADER NOTE: Jesus did not need to be born in a palace to prove He is the King of kings. In fact, from the Old Testament, we see a strong connection between God's king and the act of shepherding. David was a shepherd as a boy (1 Sam. 16:11-13). The promised Messiah-King would also be a shepherd at heart. He would perfectly follow the example of the Lord, the Shepherd of His people (see Ezek. 34:11-16; Mic. 2:12-13).

How would you have reacted to the angel's message if you were one of the shepherds?

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

"As the adopted son and heir of Julius Caesar, who had been declared divine by the Roman senate, Augustus claimed to be the son of a god. He was worshipped and hailed as the bringer of peace to the empire. But while Augustus was being flattered, the true Son of God and bringer of peace was being born in poverty in a simple peasant home that was not his own."
 —Takatamjen

22 Unit 19 | Session 1 | The Birth
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3) DIRECT THE GROUP EXPERIENCE

The Group Experience for each session includes an activity and interactive questions designed to be used in the group context to engage your group in active learning. The personal prep you and your group put into the days leading up to your group time will provide a richer discussion and more thoughtful theological applications to mutually encourage each other during your group time. The first page of the Group Experience will help you engage your group members as they arrive. Dialogue suggestions describe the context, transitions, and a recap of Bible readings or previous sessions to remind your group of what has already been studied or give a framework for where the lesson is heading. The second page gives a visual representation of the activity from the Personal Study Guide. A teaching outline helps guide your members through the activity and the debrief discussion.

Key Concept: The good news is meant to be shared.

GROUP ACTIVITY

DIAGRAM: Direct your group to page 22 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a diagram titled "Delivering the News." Recreate this Venn diagram on a board in your room so you can record the group's findings as they interact with the Scripture text.

Delivering the News
Read Luke 2:4-20. List similarities and differences in the delivery of the message of Jesus by the angels, the shepherds, and by Luke himself.

The diagram is a Venn diagram with three overlapping circles. The top circle is labeled 'LUKE'. The bottom-left circle is labeled 'THE ANGELS (Luke 2:8-14)'. The bottom-right circle is labeled 'THE SHEPHERDS (Luke 2:15-20)'. The circles overlap in the center and also overlap with the top circle.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Luke 2:4-20 aloud.

OBSERVE: Instruct the group to find the name "David" in Luke 2:4-12 and count how many times it appears. *(three)* Ask: "What would the significance of David be to the Jews at this time? What might David's name have meant to the shepherds?" Briefly review God's promise to David (2 Sam. 7:8-16) and David's identity as a shepherd of sheep and God's people (1 Sam. 16:11-13; Ezek. 34:20-24).

DISCUSS: Guide the group to consider the details of the angels' message proclaimed to the shepherds. To facilitate that, ask: "According to verse 10, what was the point of the message the angel delivered? What details in the angelic chorus's message support the first angel's point in verse 10?"

OBSERVE: Invite group members to call out ways the shepherds responded to the good news in Luke 2:15-20. Ask: "How did the response of the shepherds reveal their faith and joy?"

Notes

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- Group Activity
- Interactive Questions
- Theological Applications

4) TAKE THE NEXT STEPS

After the recap of the activity, help your group take the next steps with the day's Scripture lesson by walking them through the Head, Heart, and Hands applications. Invite volunteers to share and discuss answers to the questions for their mutual benefit. Then take prayer requests and praises as you wrap up your group time. Space is provided to jot those down in your guide for prayer during the following week. And finally, guide your group to read and pray through the designated psalm, focusing your thoughts and words once more upon God's Word as you conclude the session.

Key Concept: The good news is meant to be shared.

How can we love others, both inside and outside the church, who seem lowly by worldly standards?

HANDS: Receiving the good news of Jesus should prompt two things in the heart of the church: worship and mission. Responding to the mercy of God is seen as giving God our whole lives as a form of worship (Rom. 12:1). Every day of the week, God deserves our worship for sending Jesus as our Savior. And every day of the week, people we encounter need to hear the same good news of Jesus, the only means by which we are saved (Rom. 10:9-13).

How will you share the good news of Jesus with someone this week?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Take time to read through Luke 2:4-20 every day this week and ask the Holy Spirit to give you passion and joy to share the message of Jesus.
- Consider what your responses to the gospel this week, both private (worship) and public (ministering, evangelism), reveal about your faith.
- Pray for the people in your life who do not have a saving relationship with Jesus. Open your heart and hands to revealing to them His love, mercy and grace in the gospel.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 23 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 132 with your group, focusing on verses 10-12. Praise the Lord for the gift of salvation we receive through faith in Jesus.

References
1. "Tussenrijen," "Luka," in *South Asia Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Brian Winkler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 124-25.

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- Application Questions
- Scripture-Based Prayer
- Prayer Requests

THE SON HAS COME

By Leslie Hudson



Did you ever play “Opposite Day” when you were a kid? We did. Growing up, the children of my elementary school declared Wednesdays to be Opposite Day. I would tell my best friend her shirt was blue when it was really green; we’d tell each other we loved the milk in the cafeteria when we’d rather have anything else to drink; and we’d say we wanted to be the chalkboard washer when we really wanted to be the line leader. Those were “crazy” days.

But it was easy to get messed up on Opposite Day. Some people wouldn’t play along, which made it confusing. And sometimes there wasn’t an opposite for what was going on. So Opposite Day fizzled out within a school year, never to be observed again. (Until my kids started playing Opposite Day. The rules haven’t changed much.)

If you never played Opposite Day, what if I told you there exists an entire world that is basically the opposite of the world we know here? I’m serious. It’s a world where the humble are honored, the children lead, and the simplest knowledge is the most profound. In it, the weak are made strong, the poor are rich, and the blind and lame will guide those who think they know it all. What’s the name of this world? The kingdom of God.

God’s kingdom is just what it sounds like—it’s the place where God is King. But because He makes the rules, and everyone obeys them there, His kingdom seems a bit like Opposite Day for those of us who have lived all our years on planet Earth. The King of this kingdom is God Himself, omnipotent, holy, and without rival in power or authority. When God decided the time had come to send His representative—His Son—into our oh-so-normal world to reveal His kingdom, He did it in a way

nobody could have ever dreamed. He sent His only begotten Son into our sin-wrecked world as a human baby.

THE SON

The son of a king should come with adoration, honor, and glory. But Jesus came dismissively, born to two poor people, whom everyone believed had failed morally. But the heavens weren’t fooled

When God decided the time had come to send His representative—His Son—into our oh-so-normal world to reveal His kingdom, He did it in a way nobody could have ever dreamed. He sent His only begotten Son into our sin-wrecked world as a human baby.

Jesus had not come to play along with the status quo that had been established and sustained by the Pharisees and Sadducees. He had come to reveal the kingdom of God.

by Jesus's arrival. A multitude of angels praised God to some shepherds out watching their flocks, modeling for them the telling of the "good news of great joy" to "all the people" (Luke 2:10). We can only imagine how those shepherds' lives were changed in a moment, but nothing in Scripture leads us to believe anyone else saw or heard the angels.

The spiritually aware in the temple didn't miss Him either. Simeon and Anna, both elderly, spotted the infant Jesus even as His parents brought Him to the temple just like every other family had done with their firstborn sons. Even though the wise men traveled from the East to worship Jesus, their royal caravan didn't lead the people in Jerusalem or Bethlehem to see Him any differently. Life just kept on going. When Jesus was twelve years old, even His earthly parents failed to make sure He was safely on the road home to Galilee with their caravan, and they had to search for Him for three days before finding Him in the temple.

THE SON HAS COME

But as Jesus stepped into His earthly ministry, He caused a stir that would follow Him for the next three years. It began with a messenger, John the Baptist, who called the local Jewish leaders a "brood of vipers" (Matt. 3:7) and asked them who warned them to flee from God's wrath. This same John baptized Jesus. And after, the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit visibly came down on Him, and the Father identified Him as His Son.

Jesus quickly garnered a following—calling disciples, performing miracles, and even flipping over tables in the temple. Suffice it to say, Jesus had not come to play along with the status quo that had been established and sustained by the Pharisees and Sadducees. He had come to reveal the kingdom of God, where God is King, Jesus is Lord over every power, and God's people live as joyful servants who seek the kingdom with their very lives.

The Son didn't just make public connections though. He met privately with a seeking Pharisee, turned water into wine at a wedding, and brought a Samaritan woman to saving faith by telling her about living water. She'd heard a rumor of what worship would look like, but Jesus informed her that true worship in God's kingdom wouldn't look anything like she expected.

So as we walk through the earliest days of Jesus's earthly life over the coming weeks, imagine being a Jew living in Israel and hearing all the talk of His scandalous parents, His royal lineage, His mind for the scrolls, and His lack of decorum. God sent His Son, Jesus, to reveal His kingdom, and nobody who encountered Him would ever forget Him.

The Son has come! May we walk in His footsteps of faith, obedience, and hope in the kingdom of God.

Leslie Hudson worships with her family at First Baptist in Dickson, Tennessee. She teaches high school youth Sunday School, plays in the praise band, and is active in women's ministry. She's studying the Minor Prophets in her quiet time this year, and she's loving the challenge.

THE GOSPEL PROJECT

UNIT 19

THE ARRIVAL



MATTHEW; LUKE



MEMORY VERSES

“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: Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord.’”

—Luke 2:10-11



THE BIRTH

CORE PASSAGE: LUKE 2:4-20

CONTEXT

After more than four hundred years of silence from God, an angel of the Lord appeared to the priest Zechariah, foretelling the miraculous birth of his son, John the Baptist, who would be the forerunner for the Lord's Messiah. Later, the angel appeared again to Mary, foretelling the virgin birth of her son, Jesus, who would be the promised Messiah. A Roman census forced Mary and her husband, Joseph, to travel to Bethlehem late into Mary's pregnancy. To fulfill Scripture the Lord had arranged all these things—for His Son to be born in flesh as the promised King and Savior of the world.

KEY CONCEPT

The good news is meant to be shared.

As you read Luke 2:4-20:

- Identify ways Luke made the connection between Jesus and the line of David.
- Recognize that the shepherds spread the news of Jesus's birth, and all who heard it were amazed.



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TIMELINE

Malachi Prophesies the Messenger to Prepare the Way for the Lord (Malachi 3-4)

The Angel Foretells the Birth of John the Baptist to Prepare the Way for the Messiah (Luke 1:5-25)

SESSION STUDY: Jesus Is Born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-20)

The Intertestamental Period (400 Years of God's Silence)

The Angel Foretells the Birth of Jesus, the Son of God (Luke 1:26-56)

Mary and Joseph Take Baby Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:21-39)

Daily Readings

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: Matthew 1:1-17 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: Luke 2:8-14 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: Matthew 1:18-25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: Luke 2:15-20 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: Luke 2:1-7 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 132 |



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

**FROM THE LINE OF DAVID, AS PROPHESED,
A SAVIOR WAS BORN (LUKE 2:4-12).**

Circle the locations mentioned in the passage.

4 Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, **5** to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. **6** While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. **7** Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. **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.”

A Roman census caused Joseph and Mary to travel far away from home as Mary was late into her miraculous pregnancy (vv. 1-5). Likely the rush of people coming into Bethlehem for that same census put the couple in a bind for a place to spend the night. The best place available to them as Mary gave birth was where animals were kept. The Child who would be called Immanuel, truly “God with us” (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:22-23), was born in the most humble place imaginable. The promised King from the line of David was not placed in a cradle in a palace but in a manger.

What can we see about the character of Jesus from His birth in a lowly stable?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

GOD THE SON: Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ, He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin.

LEADER NOTE: The humility seen in the birth of Christ points to the servant character of Jesus, which is reflected in the good news. Jesus “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Jesus would lay down His life to die on the cross so that all who would believe in Him would be forgiven of their sins and receive eternal life with Him (John 3:16).

Continuing the humble circumstances of Jesus’s birth, the good news of His arrival was shared first with a lowly class of people. Shepherds were not viewed in a positive light in ancient Israel, yet some shepherds in the fields were the first to hear about the birth of Jesus, and that from an angel sent by the Lord.

What the angel said to the shepherds clues us in to the purpose of God in sending His Son to earth in this humble fashion. The news of the Messiah-King is “good news of great joy that will be for all the people” (Luke 2:10). The Messiah did not come to save just the regal and powerful, nor did He come just to save the people of Israel. Rather, He came into this world to lowly parents in a lowly stable and visited by lowly shepherds to save all people—whether Jew or Gentile—who recognize their lowly status as sinners in need of a Savior. And the angel confirmed his words with a specific sign highlighting the Messiah’s humility: the shepherds would find the Savior lying in a manger.

LEADER NOTE: Jesus did not need to be born in a palace to prove He is the King of kings. In fact, from the Old Testament, we see a strong connection between God’s king and the act of shepherding. David was a shepherd as a boy (1 Sam. 16:11-13). The promised Messiah-King would also be a shepherd at heart. He would perfectly follow the example of the Lord, the Shepherd of His people (see Ezek. 34:11-16; Mic. 2:12-13).

How would you have reacted to the angel’s message if you were one of the shepherds?

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

x _____ x

“As the adopted son and heir of Julius Caesar, who had been declared divine by the Roman senate, Augustus claimed to be the son of a god. He was worshipped and hailed as the bringer of peace to the empire. But while Augustus was being flattered, the true Son of God and bringer of peace was being born in poverty in a simple peasant home that was not his own.”¹

–Takatemjen

HEARING THE GOOD NEWS, WE RESPOND, SHARE IT WITH OTHERS, AND PRAISE GOD (LUKE 2:13-20).

Highlight the ways the shepherds responded to the good news they heard and witnessed.

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.” **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.

This night for the shepherds went from one miraculous moment to the next. First, they heard from an angel while being surrounded by the glory of the Lord. Then the single angel was joined by a multitude of angels praising God for the birth of Christ. Finally, they would see with their own eyes the fulfillment of all God’s promises in the Messiah, who came to bring peace between God and humanity.

LEADER NOTE: The angels sang of glory to God and “peace on earth to people he favors” on account of Jesus’s birth (v. 14). This “peace” is not referring primarily to an earthly sort of peace where wars cease, though that will come true one day (Rev. 21:4). Rather, this peace highlights the reconciliation between God and human beings because of the atoning sacrifice that Jesus would be. The gospel gives those who believe “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

Without hesitation, the shepherds went to Bethlehem and found the baby exactly as the angel had said: wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. They heard the good news from the angel, but then they went to see firsthand what had been made known to them by the Lord, and they were not disappointed. Here we see the good news of Jesus requires a response from those who hear it.

Key Concept: The good news is meant to be shared.

Notes

What are different possible responses from those who hear the gospel?

The shepherds responded to the angel by going, by obeying the call of the Lord. They also responded by proclaiming to others what had been proclaimed to them. They relayed to Mary and Joseph and more the amazing things they had heard from the angel, and their testimony of God's good news amazed all who heard them. In this, the shepherds were doing what they had already seen from the angels; this was the beginning of the proclamation of the good news to the world.

LEADER NOTE: Shepherding was viewed as a low-class sort of job, yet God chose some lowly men of this profession to be the first witnesses of Jesus's birth. Furthermore, God chose these men to be among the first human proclaimers of the good news of the Savior. God "has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise" (1 Cor. 1:27). Regardless of what people might have thought about shepherds, these shepherds couldn't help but share what they had seen and heard with others as they praised the Lord for His great gift in Jesus. They wanted all who heard them to have the same joy they were experiencing. This same sentiment should mark all who believe the gospel.

Following the angels in one more step, the shepherds responded with worship. The angels erupted with glory to God; the shepherds went to Bethlehem to see the Messiah for themselves, and they left Bethlehem "glorifying and praising God" for all He had done for them on this night (Luke 2:20). No doubt their worship led to even more opportunities to share the good news of Jesus.

If we have received the gospel by faith, what should our following responsive actions be?

CHRIST CONNECTION

As prophesied in Scripture and proclaimed by an angel, Jesus, the Lord and the Messiah, was born in Bethlehem. The shepherds heard the gospel, shared it with others, and all were amazed.

ARRIVAL

INTERACT: As your group arrives, ask for a few volunteers to share some good news they received recently. After the news is shared, ask: “Whom did you tell first?” Share about a time when you were bursting with excitement and why you chose to tell a particular person first, perhaps familiarity with the situation or an expected response.

TRANSITION: Sometimes in life we decide to walk through a trying situation privately, but when good news comes, we want to tell everyone we know. God had pointed ahead to the birth of His Messiah for centuries, even millennia, and He made sure this amazing event would not go unnoticed.

CONTEXT

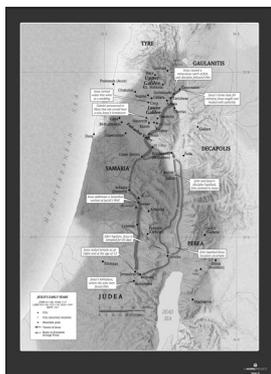
SAY: Previously we considered the priest Zechariah’s prophetic words as he described his son as the forerunner of God’s promised Messiah. But in the four-hundred-year gap between Gabriel’s message and Malachi’s prophecy, there was silence. Yet God’s silence didn’t mean He wasn’t working. God is always working His perfect plan in His perfect timing, preparing His people for what comes next. And when the good news of the Messiah’s arrival finally came, it was proclaimed in a way no hearer would ever forget.

TRANSITION: In the Old Testament, God spoke to His people through Himself, His law, His Spirit, and His prophets. As we step into the New Testament with the birth of Jesus, we see that God is still speaking through His incarnate Son.

RECAP

ASK: As you prepared from Luke 2 this week, what stood out to you in a fresh way? What did you observe in the shepherds that made you realize they were the perfect candidates for such an important message?

TRANSITION: Our core passage is considered by many to be the “Christmas story.” (*Display **Pack Item 2: Jesus’s Early Years** and point out Nazareth and Bethlehem on the map.*) Most church attenders have heard this story many times: Joseph and Mary left Nazareth and went to Bethlehem, she gave birth, the angel appeared to shepherds, and the shepherds went to see the Christ Child. Today we’ll focus on the delivery of this good news to help inform our delivery of the gospel to others.



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Key Concept: The good news is meant to be shared.

GROUP ACTIVITY

DIAGRAM: Direct your group to page 22 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a diagram titled “Delivering the News.” Recreate this Venn diagram on a board in your room so you can record the group’s findings as they interact with the Scripture text.

Notes

Delivering the News

Read Luke 2:4-20. List similarities and differences in the delivery of the message of Jesus by the angels, the shepherds, and by Luke himself.



READ: Invite a volunteer to read Luke 2:4-20 aloud.

OBSERVE: Instruct the group to find the name “David” in Luke 2:4-12 and count how many times it appears. (*three*) Ask: “What would the significance of David be to the Jews at this time? What might David’s name have meant to the shepherds?” Briefly review God’s promise to David (2 Sam. 7:8-16) and David’s identity as a shepherd of sheep and God’s people (1 Sam. 16:11-13; Ezek. 34:20-24).

DISCUSS: Guide the group to consider the details of the angels’ message proclaimed to the shepherds. To facilitate that, ask: “According to verse 10, what was the point of the message the angel delivered? What details in the angelic chorus’s message support the first angel’s point in verse 10?”

OBSERVE: Invite group members to call out ways the shepherds responded to the good news in Luke 2:15-20. Ask: “How did the response of the shepherds reveal their faith and joy?”

ENGAGE: Lead the group to complete the diagram on the board and in their PSGs by filling in the circles with details of the three different groups delivering the message, highlighting differences and similarities. Clarify that Luke's message included that of the angels and the shepherds, but his was unique in his delivery, focusing on the facts of the gospel (Luke 1:3-4). *(for example: motivations for sharing the good news: Angels—praise; Shepherds—personal testimony; Luke—detailed account of the gospel)* Note that the primary focus for the angels, the shepherds, and Luke was simply telling others that the Christ was born. The angels were holy, heavenly beings, the shepherds were lowly and humble, yet both heard the good news, believed it, and shared it with others.

DEBRIEF

What were some emotions and motivations that surrounded the telling of Jesus's birth?

What does sharing the miraculous story of Jesus reveal about our faith? What does a lack of sharing it reveal?

SUMMARIZE

The story of the shepherds represents our story as well. We too have heard the good news that Jesus, God in the flesh, has come to be our Savior, Messiah, and Lord, and we are called to believe in Him for ourselves. Once we have believed, we then are called to tell others the same good news shared with us. Like the shepherds, let us give God glory as we tell others the good news of Jesus.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 23). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: Humility is something human beings have struggled with since the sin of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. As sinners, we all exhibit pride in one form or another. True humility is put on full display in Luke 2. Jesus was born into humble circumstances, and the Lord chose a humble group of shepherds to be the first witnesses to the birth of the Messiah.

What are some ways we might exhibit the humility of Jesus on display in the circumstances of His birth?



HEART: It is easy to assume many things about another person based on their appearance or occupation, but God operates on a different level: "Humans see what is visible, but the LORD sees the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). God uses all kinds of people to accomplish His will, often those who don't look appealing in a worldly sense. We should seek to follow God's heart by looking beyond external factors, seeing others as God sees them and loving them as God does.

How can we love others, both inside and outside the church, who seem lowly by worldly standards?



HANDS: Receiving the good news of Jesus should prompt two things in the heart of the church: worship and mission. Responding to the mercy of God is seen as giving God our whole lives as a form of worship (Rom. 12:1). Every day of the week, God deserves our worship for sending Jesus as our Savior. And every day of the week, people we encounter need to hear the same good news of Jesus, the only means by which we are saved (Rom. 10:9-13).

How will you share the good news of Jesus with someone this week?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Take time to read through Luke 2:4-20 every day this week and ask the Holy Spirit to give you passion and joy to share the message of Jesus.
- Consider what your responses to the gospel this week, both private (worship) and public (ministering, evangelism), reveal about your faith.
- Pray for the people in your life who do not have a saving relationship with Jesus. Open your heart and hands to revealing to them His love, mercy, and grace in the gospel.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 23 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 132 with your group, focusing on verses 10-12. Praise the Lord for the gift of salvation we receive through faith in Jesus.

References

1. Takatemjen, "Luke," in South Asia Bible Commentary, gen. ed. Brian Wintle (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 1334-35.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE INCARNATION

By Mike Leake



Even if you don't know much about Jesus, you've probably heard that He walked on water. It's an amazing story included in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John. You also should know that it wasn't a peaceful little pool on which Jesus did His water-walking. It was in the middle of a storm that had seasoned fishermen worried for their lives.

Mark, in his Gospel, included a neat little phrase that likely came from Exodus 33 or Job 9. He said that Jesus "wanted to pass by them" (Mark 6:48). Mark was clueing us into the fact that this was a display of Christ's deity. We're supposed to see the almighty power of Jesus all throughout this story.

As amazing as it is that Jesus walked on the water, I actually think there is another verse that is even more awe-inspiring. It's a little phrase in Mark 6:51: "Then he got into the boat with them." Do you realize what Mark was telling us there? He was telling us that the eternal I AM, the One who can calm the winds and the waves, was now climbing into a boat with common fishermen.

This is the wonder of the incarnation. God became flesh. I'm not shocked that God can walk on water. But I am shocked that He'd stoop so low to get in a boat with humanity.

GOD BECAME FLESH

We really shouldn't be that shocked by the story though. God has always been moving toward His people. You see it first in the garden of Eden—even after the first couple rebelled. God moved toward His people in the tabernacle in the wilderness. All throughout the Scriptures, God was making

Himself known. But the most breathtaking revelation of them all was when God the Son took on human flesh and entered our world.

It's theologically true that in order to redeem humanity—in order to make a fitting sacrifice—God the Son had to take on human flesh. He had to be a fitting representative (Heb. 2:17). But did He have to get into boats? Did He have to touch lepers? Did it require Him to laugh with us or weep with us? Did He have to get this close?

This is the mystery and mercy of the gospel: the God who made us became like us so as to rescue us.

FOR A PURPOSE

This wasn't a backup plan. According to Ephesians 1:4-7, this was God's Plan A. Before the foundation of the world, the triune God purposed to redeem humanity through the Son. The Father sent, the Son came, and the Spirit empowered.

We shouldn't think here of the incarnation like the show *Undercover Boss*. In that show the person in charge becomes like one of the employees to see what it's like to work there. Along the way they make a few friends, bless some of their more faithful employees, and then go back to being the CEO of the company.¹ Jesus didn't become a man just to observe our condition. He shared in it fully. He took on our human nature. Jesus hungered, wept, grew tired, and was tempted, though He was without sin (Heb. 4:15). In every respect, He entered into the reality of life in a broken world. But unlike an undercover boss, He became human for the very purpose of dying in our place.

*It's theologically true that in order to redeem humanity—
in order to make a fitting sacrifice—
God the Son had to take on human flesh.*

GOD'S SYMPATHY

Because Jesus lived as one of us, He understands us. He knows what it's like to grieve a loss, to feel lonely, and to face rejection. The Bible says, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

The incarnation means that when we pray, Jesus truly understands our situation. When we face temptation, and even when we fall, we go to a Savior who understands the weight of living in this broken world as a dependent human being. And because He never fell to sin, He understands the full force of temptation. We have an advocate who gets it because He lived it (1 John 2:1).

The incarnation means that when we pray, Jesus truly understands our situation. . . . We have an advocate who gets it because He lived it.

GOD'S IMAGE

When Jesus took on flesh, He didn't become something less. He didn't cease being God. Rather, He revealed something more. He is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). What sin has distorted in us, Christ displays in fullness. When we look at Jesus, we see humanity as it was meant to be—and God as He truly is.

The incarnation shows us the value of human life. Every person is made in the image of God. And Jesus becoming one of us reinforces our conviction about the dignity of all people, from the least to the greatest, from the womb to the deathbed. Every person reflects the beauty of what Jesus came to redeem.

THE SON HAS COME NEAR

The miracle of the incarnation isn't only that God came near—it's that He came near on purpose, and that purpose was to rescue us. The Son of God not only took upon Himself human flesh, He carried our sorrows and our sins. Jesus, fully God and fully man, getting in the boat with His disciples illustrates His mission to fully enter our world and redeem us.

The Son of God has come near.

References

1. Stephen Lambert and Greg Goldman, *Undercover Boss*, CBS (Los Angeles: All3Media, 2010).

Mike Leake is husband to Nikki and father to Isaiah and Hannah. He is also the lead pastor at Calvary of Neosho, Missouri. His writing home is mikeleake.net and on Substack at *Proverbs 4 Today*, a daily devotional.

THE DEDICATION

CORE PASSAGE: LUKE 2:25-38

CONTEXT

According to Mosaic law, every firstborn son was to be consecrated to the Lord and redeemed with a sacrifice (Ex. 13:1-2,11-15), and every woman was to present a sacrifice in the temple a certain number of days after childbirth (Lev. 12:1-8). So Joseph and Mary brought the infant Jesus to the temple, so that even as a baby, He fulfilled every requirement of the law. At the temple, two faithful, elderly people had been waiting for the Messiah, and now they would wait no more.

KEY CONCEPT

Jesus is the only hope of salvation for the whole world.

As you examine Luke 2:25-38:

- Contemplate Simeon's identification of Jesus as God's salvation and a light for revelation to the Gentiles.
- Recognize that Anna's devotion to the Lord led her to the moment when she saw and worshiped the infant Jesus.



TIMELINE

The Angel Foretells the Birth of Jesus, the Son of God (Luke 1:26-56)

SESSION STUDY: Mary and Joseph Take Baby Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:21-39)

Young Jesus Remains in His Father's House (Luke 2:40-52)

Jesus Is Born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-20)

Wise Men from the East Search for the Promised King (Matthew 2:1-12)

Daily Readings

- Day 1:** Luke 2:21-24
- Day 2:** Luke 2:25-32
- Day 3:** Luke 2:33-35
- Day 4:** Luke 2:36-38
- Day 5:** Luke 2:39-40
- Day 6:** Psalm 27



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

JESUS CAME TO BRING SALVATION TO JEWS AND GENTILES, BUT AT A COST (LUKE 2:25-35).

Underline all the references to the Holy Spirit.

25 There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, looking forward to Israel's consolation, and the Holy Spirit was on him. **26** It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he saw the Lord's Messiah. **27** Guided by the Spirit, he entered the temple. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform for him what was customary under the law, **28** Simeon took him up in his arms, praised God, and said, **29** "Now, Master, you can dismiss your servant in peace, as you promised. **30** For my eyes have seen your salvation. **31** You have prepared it in the presence of all peoples— **32** a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel." **33** His father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. **34** Then Simeon blessed them and told his mother Mary, "Indeed, this child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed— **35** and a sword will pierce your own soul—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Simeon was a man who loved God very much. At some point in Simeon's life, the Holy Spirit told him that he would see the Messiah before he died. We do not know how long Simeon waited to see "Israel's consolation" with his own eyes (v. 25). Maybe a matter of days; maybe decades.

LEADER NOTE: The phrase "the Holy Spirit was on [Simeon]" conveys that the Spirit was on him continually. In the Old Testament, God gave His Spirit to certain people to accomplish His will, including Bezalel (Ex. 31:1-5), Moses (Num. 11:25), Joshua (Num. 27:18), and David (1 Sam. 16:13). Nevertheless, sin could cause someone to lose God's Spirit (Judg. 16:20; 1 Sam. 16:14; cf. Ps. 51:11). After Jesus's death and resurrection, however, those who repent and trust in Jesus receive the Holy Spirit permanently (Eph. 1:13; 4:30).

Simeon had to wait to see the promised Messiah, and Israel would have to wait three decades more for their salvation to be fulfilled in Jesus's death and resurrection. Yet Jesus came to give light and hope to all men—Jew and Gentile alike.

What are you faithfully and prayerfully waiting for God to accomplish in this season of your life?

Key Concept: Jesus is the only hope of salvation for the whole world.

Simeon's reaction to seeing the Messiah is one of the most poignant moments we see in the early life of Jesus. Simeon was so satisfied that he said the Lord could "dismiss [him] in peace," meaning death, because his entire life had been leading up to that glorious moment (Luke 2:29). Nothing could surpass the satisfaction Simeon received in seeing God incarnate, the consolation of Israel and hope for the Gentiles—in short, God's salvation for the whole world.

Notes

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

SALVATION: Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense, salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

Yet along with the promise of Simeon's words came a dire warning. Up to this point, Mary had only heard of the salvation and hope that Jesus would bring. But Simeon warned of the opposition Jesus would face during His ministry, for which Mary too would suffer as His mother (vv. 34-35). Simeon's prophecy echoed Isaiah's prophecy of the Servant of the Lord: "But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5).

LEADER NOTE: Mary and Joseph had experienced angelic revelations (Luke 1:26-38; Matt. 1:20-25), the virgin birth (Luke 2:6-7), and the visit and testimony of the shepherds (Luke 2:16-18). Yet when Simeon held baby Jesus and prophesied, they were amazed (Luke 2:33). Perhaps in the everyday concerns of infant parents, they needed a reminder of Jesus's purpose in coming to earth. Jesus is the Messiah who would save His people from their sins at great personal cost. Mary would stand at the foot of the cross as her Savior—her Son—died to redeem her (John 19:25-30).

How have you experienced suffering as a part of God's call on your life?

SERVING GOD MEANS RECOGNIZING JESUS AS GOD'S PROMISED REDEEMER (LUKE 2:36-38).

Underline Anna's two responses to having seen Jesus in the temple.

36 There was also a prophetess, Anna, a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well along in years, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, **37** and was a widow for eighty-four years. She did not leave the temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayers.

38 At that very moment, she came up and began to thank God and to speak about him to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Perhaps no sooner had Simeon returned the infant Jesus to His mother's arms, we see another witness to Jesus's messiahship enter the scene. In the first couple of verses, we get a glimpse of Anna's godly character and devotion to the Lord's service. No doubt many religious people overlooked the birth of Jesus and didn't see anything out of the ordinary in this firstborn Son brought for dedication, but Anna was not one of them.

LEADER NOTE: Anna was from the tribe of Asher, one of the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. After Israel had been conquered by Assyria in 722 BC, King Hezekiah of Judah sent letters throughout the land of Israel to anyone who might have escaped the attack, urging them to return to the Lord and worship Him faithfully (2 Chron. 30:1-12). Most of the inhabitants laughed at the couriers, but "some from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem" (v. 11). Anna likely descended from these repentant Asherites.

Anna was an older widow. Though she lost her husband at a young age, God had blessed her with many years of life, and she had devoted those decades to the Lord's service. She could have allowed her age or widowhood to be an excuse to focus on her own needs. Yet day and night, she served God in the temple with fasting and prayers.

How have you seen those older than you serve the Lord with devotion?

Anna's loss of her husband and the subsequent difficulties of being a widow did not deter her from continuing to be faithful to the Lord, nor did these experiences hinder her ability to see the salvation of God coming into the world. Her devotion to God and His promises was rooted in the faith she had in the Word of God in spite of the sum of her circumstances.

Key Concept: Jesus is the only hope of salvation for the whole world.

Notes

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

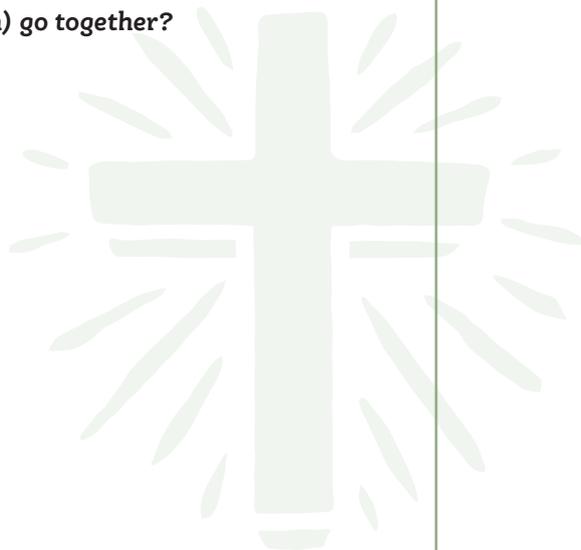
“One immediate fruit of patience is peace: A sweet tranquility of mind, a serenity of spirit that can never be found except where patience reigns. And this peace often rises into joy. Even in the midst of various temptations, those who are enabled in patience to possess their souls can witness not only quietness of spirit but triumph and exultation.”¹

—John Wesley (1703–1791)

Much in the same way the shepherds worshiped and then became proclaimers, we see the same sort of rhythm from Anna. She first thanked God at the sight of the Messiah, and then she told anyone she could about the good news she had witnessed with her own eyes (Luke 2:38).

LEADER NOTE: Since the end of the Old Testament, there had been no prophet for hundreds of years. So it is very noteworthy that God raised up Anna as a prophetess. In all the Old Testament, there were only five prophetesses mentioned: Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Deborah (Judg. 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Isaiah’s wife (Isa. 8:3), and Noadiah—a false prophetess (Neh. 6:14). Anna may have been considered a prophetess because of her testimony of the Messiah.

Why do worship and proclamation (evangelism) go together?



GOSPEL CONNECTION

At the temple, even as an infant, Jesus was recognized as the Messiah, the One who would fulfill God’s promise of salvation.

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: Display some baby photos of your children, grandchildren, or other babies with whom you were close. As group members arrive, briefly share your relationship with those babies and how you have maintained contact with them throughout their lives. Share how those babies are now grown or growing and what kind of people they have become.

TRANSITION: When babies are born, we have high hopes for them. We want them to be healthy, happy, successful, and grow into maturity as strong adults. We watch with joy mixed with sorrow as those babies grow up and experience all the things life throws at them: success and failure, love and heartbreak, joy and sorrow. Today we're going to look at the specific hope two people found in the baby Jesus.

CONTEXT

SAY: In last week's session, we saw the announcement of Jesus's birth made by the angels and the shepherds. Jesus had been born in Bethlehem, five miles from Jerusalem. When the time was right, Joseph and Mary obeyed the law in regards to this Baby born to them (see Ex. 13:1-2,11-16; Lev. 12:1-8). Their journey to Jerusalem and the presentation of Jesus would have been the same process followed by all Jewish parents for a thousand years, but this visit to the temple was anything but expected.

RECAP

ENGAGE: Say: "In your personal preparation this week, you read about the unexpected people who prophesied and worshiped baby Jesus in the temple: Simeon and Anna." Encourage your group to describe Simeon and Anna and to share what stood out in their study this week. Ask: "If you could ask Simeon and Anna one question today, what would you ask? What do you think they would say in response?"

TRANSITION: Display **Pack Item 5: Light and Glory** and read the verse. Say: "These two elderly worshipers had devoted their lives to the Lord in faith and obedience, and on this day, they found God's reward of seeing the promised One and holding Him. Today we'll examine together the faith and obedience Simeon and Anna exhibited in our core passage."



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Key Concept: Jesus is the only hope of salvation for the whole world.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

CHART: Direct your group to page 32 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will “Faith and Obedience.” Recreate this chart on a board in your room so you can record the group’s findings as they interact with the Scripture text.

Faith and Obedience		
Read Luke 2:25-38. Record ways each person below showed their faith in God’s promises and how faith was revealed in their obedience.		
	FAITH	OBEDIENCE
SIMEON		
ANNA		

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Luke 2:25-35 aloud.

ENGAGE: Discuss with your group Simeon’s faith—what he believed—and his faithful obedience, writing down the evidence of each in the space provided. (*Simeon kept the law of Moses; he was looking for the promised Messiah; he went to the temple at the Spirit’s leading.*) Ask: “How does this description of Simeon’s faith and obedience reveal his relationship with God?”

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Luke 2:36-38 aloud.

ENGAGE: Talk through the signs of Anna’s faith as described in the passage and how it was revealed in her obedience, recording these on the chart in the appropriate spaces. (*Though a once-young and now long-time widow, Anna devoted herself to the Lord’s service; she fasted and prayed; she also was looking forward to the Messiah and testified that Jesus was the One they had been waiting for.*)

Key Concept: Jesus is the only hope of salvation for the whole world.



HANDS: Over and over in Scripture, we see God use people whose age was a liability. Abraham and Sarah were old, yet Abraham received God's promises. King Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and God used him to repair the temple and destroy the idols in the land. God can use the faithful at any age for His glory.

How will you encourage an older or younger believer in their faith this week?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Meditate on Luke 2:25-38 in the coming week, asking God to highlight one description of Jesus. Carry that description in your heart and mind as you go throughout your day.
- Consider how others might look at your life and describe your faith: How do your words and actions reflect what you know to be true about God and His salvation?
- Pray for unsaved people and missionaries, considering how God's salvation is going to the ends of the earth. Give of your time, money, and prayer as an offering to God's global ministry.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 33 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 27 with your group, focusing on verses 1-3. Thank the Lord for the gift of Jesus, our light and our salvation (v. 1), and pray for boldness for your group to share this good news with the world.

References

1. John Wesley, "On Patience" in *The Essential Works of John Wesley*, ed. Alice Russie (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, Inc., 2011), 389.

Notes

THE VISIT

CORE PASSAGE: MATTHEW 2:1-12

CONTEXT

Mary and Joseph experienced much in the years surrounding Jesus's birth. An angel gave each of them a message concerning God's Son being conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26-38; Matt. 1:18-25). A Roman census sent them traveling to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born and visited by shepherds. And at the temple in Jerusalem, they were amazed at Simeon's and Anna's reactions to their infant Son (Luke 2:25-38). Some time later, still in Bethlehem, they received yet more visitors—this time wise men from a pagan land looking for the promised King.

KEY CONCEPT

Jesus is the true King and worthy to be worshiped.

As you examine Matthew 2:1-12:

- Consider that knowing Jesus is King can cause us to worship or cause us disturbance.
- Recognize that true worship must be directed toward the One worthy of worship.



TIMELINE

The Angel Foretells the Birth of Jesus, the Son of God (Luke 1:26-56)

Mary and Joseph Take Baby Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:21-39)

Young Jesus Remains in His Father's House (Luke 2:40-52)

Jesus Is Born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-20)

SESSION STUDY: Wise Men from the East Search for the Promised King (Matthew 2:1-12)

Daily Readings

- Day 1:** Matthew 2:1-6
- Day 2:** Matthew 2:7-12
- Day 3:** Matthew 2:13-15
- Day 4:** Matthew 2:16-18
- Day 5:** Matthew 2:19-23
- Day 6:** Psalm 47



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes



SCAN ME

Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to learn more about Jerusalem and King Herod at the time of the wise men's arrival.

JESUS CAME FROM HUMBLE MEANS TO BE OUR HUMBLE KING (MATTHEW 2:1-6).

Circle the wise men's reactions to the birth of Jesus. Underline the reaction of King Herod and the people of Jerusalem.

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, **2** saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him." **3** When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. **4** So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born. **5** "In Bethlehem of Judea," they told him, "because this is what was written by the prophet: **6** And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

In much the same way the shepherds immediately went to find baby Jesus after the angel's message, the wise men went looking for the newborn King when they saw a sign in the heavens. The wise men, well-versed in astronomy, saw an unusual star and determined that it heralded the birth of the "king of the Jews" (v. 2). So they packed up a caravan with gifts and traveled thousands of miles to worship this new King.

LEADER NOTE: "From the east" is a general term to describe the wise men's homeland (v. 1). Many scholars hold the opinion that these men came from Babylon or Persia because of Daniel's role among the kings and wise men of Babylon and Persia (see Dan. 2:48; 5:29; 6:3,26-28), but we cannot be certain of this.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

CHRIST AS KING: God has always been King over His creation, whether in heaven or on earth. Yet some of His creatures in both realms have rebelled against Him, leaving destruction in their wake. To restore His broken world, God promised a King who would deliver His people and restore all of creation. The promise of a coming King finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ and looks forward to its perfection when Jesus returns for His bride, the church.

King Herod, on the other hand, had quite a different response. As soon as Herod heard of another king who might threaten his throne, he became disturbed immediately. While Luke's Gospel highlighted people who were excited to see the Messiah, Matthew's Gospel highlighted Herod and Jerusalem's negative reaction to the news of the rightful King's birth.

How might people today be disturbed by the news of Jesus and His gospel?

Herod wanted to figure out where this new King had been born so he could eliminate his competition, but he was unsure where to start his search. The religious leaders and scribes, on the other hand, were not. The birthplace of the Messiah had been foretold by the prophet Micah in Micah 5:2. The Jewish leaders could pinpoint the exact location Herod needed because of the powerful prophecy God had already put in His Word.

Herod, in his selfish pride, sought to protect his throne, but Micah's prophecy concerning Bethlehem pointed to the nature of Jesus as a humble King. The Gospel of Luke showed the lowly shepherds visiting the King of kings as He slept in a manger. Matthew recorded that the little town of Bethlehem was great only in the sense that it would be the birthplace of the "ruler" who would "stand and shepherd [His people] in the strength of the LORD" (Mic. 5:2,4).

LEADER NOTE: The book of Micah described the Messiah as a ruler and shepherd over His people. It was not a coincidence that God anointed David—a literal shepherd of sheep—to be king after Saul. After Saul died, the people said of David: "Even while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led us out to battle and brought us back. The LORD also said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will be ruler over Israel'" (2 Sam. 5:2). Though He was heir to David's throne (see 2 Sam. 7; Matt. 1:1-17), Jesus also would identify Himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11).

Why do you think God sent the Savior into the world as a humble king?

THE RESULT OF KNOWING JESUS IS JOYFUL WORSHIP

(MATTHEW 2:7-12).

Highlight the description of the wise men's worship of Jesus.

7 Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. **8** He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him." **9** After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. **11** Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

At no point in Matthew 2 do we see the wise men worship King Herod. They visited with Herod and traded questions, but that was as far as their interaction went. They deferred to him as the current ruler over Israel, but they never worshiped this king of Judea in any way. Herod was never the destination for the wise men to come and worship; he was just a stop along the way.

The strangers from a faraway land knew they had another King to come and worship. They were not going to give anything to Herod that was due to the one true King. We do not know if they believed that Herod also wanted to worship the new King—which he didn't (vv. 13-20)—but they went on their way to Bethlehem to fulfill their mission.

LEADER NOTE: Herod the Great had a reputation of being a vicious, bloodthirsty tyrant who killed anyone he perceived as a threat, including his wives and sons.¹ He had no intention of worshiping Jesus but instead wanted to kill Him, as we see from his paranoid rage and the massacre he ordered of all the young boys two years old and younger in and around Bethlehem, a number he had derived from the information given to him by the wise men (vv. 16-18).

What things in life compete for our attention, devotion, and worship, distracting us from true worship of Jesus?

Key Concept: Jesus is the true King and worthy to be worshiped.

Once the wise men left Herod in Jerusalem, they again saw the star they had followed from the East. This miraculous star brought the men overwhelming joy because it led them to the King they had sought. The long journey for these wise men was finally ending with a face-to-face encounter with Jesus.

Even though Jesus was just a small child at the time, the wise men worshiped Him as the King the star had heralded. The wise men were not too prestigious to be focused on what mattered most. They had come all the way to Bethlehem so they could worship and give gifts to the King of kings who had been born. They came with priceless and meaningful gifts to worship the only King worthy of their time and attention.

LEADER NOTE: The gifts the wise men brought were not just trinkets or baby toys. These gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—were incredibly valuable gifts that people would bring to celebrate the birth of royalty. Jesus, the Son of God born in humble circumstances, was given the worship and gifts that were appropriate for Him, the King of the Jews.

What are some ways you give Jesus the worship He truly deserves?



CHRIST CONNECTION

x

x

The wise men from a foreign country recognized Jesus as the King of the Jews, as creation aligned to reveal His birthplace. And when they found Him, they rightfully worshiped Him.

Notes

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: Before your group arrives, list the following on a board: “king of the hill,” “king of spades,” “king of the jungle,” “homecoming king,” “king cobra,” and “chicken a la king.” As group members arrive, engage them in adding to the list of other “kings” we may mention or see.

TRANSITION: For most people in the United States in the 21st century, the title of king doesn’t mean much to us, and some kings of other countries are merely figureheads, not the ones making decisions for the people. But at the time of Jesus’s birth, a king carried weight, significance, and honor. Good or bad, ruthless or merciful, kings ruled with ultimate authority. Let’s keep a first-century understanding in our minds as we consider today’s passage.

CONTEXT

SUMMARIZE: The incarnation and birth of Christ is surrounded with an air of mystery and grand proclamations. But in our questions about Jesus’s earthly beginnings, we are given certain details about who Jesus is: He is the Son of God; He was born of a woman; He is the Seed promised to defeat the serpent (see Gen. 3:15); He is King of kings and Lord of lords. And from His earliest days on earth, Jesus was worshiped by people near and far.

RECAP

RECALL: In your personal preparation this week, you considered both Jesus’s humility and His worthiness as well as the various reactions to the news of His birth as King. After summarizing highlights of the session ask the group what details of this story impacted them this week. What did this passage cause you to consider about your own understanding of Christ?

TRANSITION: In the midst of the nostalgia and familiarity surrounding the wise men visiting Jesus, our activity today will help us to focus on the Lord’s work behind the scenes so that His Son, the newborn King, would be recognized and worshiped.



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Key Concept: Jesus is the true King and worthy to be worshiped.

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

BOXES: Direct your group to page 40 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find “Linking the Prophecies.” Recreate the boxes and verses on a board in your room so you can record the group’s findings as they interact with the Scripture text.

Linking the Prophecies

Read Matthew 2:1-12. Compare the passages to the prophecies listed below.

<div style="background-color: #4a7c59; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">THE WISE MEN</div> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">Matthew 2:1-2,11</p> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 30px;">Isaiah 60:1-6</p>	<div style="background-color: #4a7c59; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">THE STAR</div> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">Matthew 2:2,7,9-10</p> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 30px;">Numbers 24:15-19</p>
<div style="background-color: #4a7c59; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">BETHLEHEM</div> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">Matthew 2:1-8</p> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 30px;">Micah 5:1-6</p>	<div style="background-color: #4a7c59; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">RULER/SHEPHERD</div> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">Matthew 2:1-8</p> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 30px;">Ezekiel 34:15-24</p>

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 2:1-12 aloud.

ENGAGE: Form four smaller groups and assign each group one of the prophecies concerning Jesus. Encourage the groups to read both Scripture passages and to compare the prophecy and its potential fulfillment. *(Apart from an explicit reference in the New Testament, we should be cautious about certainty when connecting prophecies and potential fulfillments, yet we can consider the validity of such connections.)*

FOCUS: Call for a volunteer from the first group to read Isaiah 60:1-6. Ask: “What did you notice about Isaiah’s prophecy about foreigners from far off bringing gifts and proclaiming praise to the Lord?” Follow this pattern with the other groups and discuss the prophecies regarding the star, Bethlehem, and the Shepherd over the people of Israel. Write down the group’s findings on the board, and encourage them to record them in their PSGs.

ENGAGE: As a group, consider how these men from far away understood the significance of Jesus's birth even as the religious leaders in Jerusalem, who were well-versed in such prophecies, had missed it. Ask: "How is it that the wise men reacted to Jesus with worship, and yet, the people who should have known better, disregarded His birth? (*Recall the following question from LG p. 46; PSG p. 39*) What things in life compete for our attention, devotion, and worship, distracting us from true worship of Jesus?"

DEBRIEF

How can we, like the wise men, reveal to others that we follow Jesus with our time, money, focus, and hearts?

SUMMARIZE

Jesus came as a humble baby, practically undetected by the world. But God's plan for His Son included at least one moment of royal recognition, and it came in the form of wise men from the east. By their diligent searching, meaningful gifts, and humble bowing, they revealed that they truly understood who He is—the King of the Jews. May we too be bearers of this truth to the world as we proclaim and worship Jesus as King of our lives.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 41). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Head** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: Some people read the prophecies that God made of the Messiah in the Old Testament and assume that they have no sort of relevance for us in the church today. Yet fulfilled messianic prophecies reveal that God is who He says He is. The power of His Word throughout the course of history shows how faithful and powerful the Lord is.

How can recognizing the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in the life of Jesus bolster your faith?



HEART: Responses to the rule and reign of Jesus can be wide ranging. Some people feel threatened by what submitting to Jesus would cost them. Others see Jesus for who He is and want to give everything they have to worship Him.

What do you need to confess or release to worship Jesus with all you have?



HANDS: Worship flows from the recognition of who God is and what He has done for us—namely, the Father sent His Son into the world to save sinners. For those who have repented of sin and believed in Jesus, we should desire to worship God with our words, our gifts, our time, and our talents.

Key Concept: Jesus is the true King and worthy to be worshiped.

What is something you will give God today as an act of worship for the gift of His Son, our King?

Notes

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Write the word "King" on your mirror in a dry erase marker or on a sticky note in a prominent place. As you see it this week, take time to reflect on Jesus and to consider your own life: How are you regarding Jesus as King?
- As you pray this week, consider how you posture yourself before the King of creation: Are you approaching Him hurriedly, unfocused, flippantly? Or are you regarding Him as worthy of your time, energy and praise?
- Using a topical Bible or Bible app, do a word search for every time Jesus is identified as King in the Bible, and consider how this impacted His life and death.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 41 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 47:5-9 with your group. Praise the Lord for being the King of the whole earth (vv. 6-7) and for sending His Son, Jesus, as King over all the nations (vv. 8-9).

References

1. David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, eds. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2013), 33–34.

THE TEMPLE

CORE PASSAGE: LUKE 2:40-52

CONTEXT

The first few weeks of Jesus's life evidenced that He was not an ordinary child like the rest of us. Through announcements from angels, words spoken by strangers, and prophecies made over Jesus, He was identified as the Savior the world had been waiting for. That same Savior would grow in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man, always keeping His focus on His mission from the Father.

KEY CONCEPT

Jesus, who is fully human and fully God, is the source of wisdom and knowledge.

As you examine Luke 2:40-52:

- Note that Mary and Joseph were obedient and faithful to God's ways.
- Meditate on the fact that Jesus longed to be in His Father's house.



TIMELINE

Jesus Is Born in Bethlehem
(Luke 2:1-20)

Wise Men from the East Search for
the Promised King (Matthew 2:1-12)

John the Baptist Calls People to Repentance
in Preparation for Jesus (Matthew 3:1-12)

Mary and Joseph Take Baby
Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem
(Luke 2:21-39)

**SESSION STUDY: Young Jesus
Remains in His Father's House**
(Luke 2:40-52)

John Baptizes Jesus
in the Jordan River
(Matthew 3:13-17)

Daily Readings

- Day 1:** Luke 2:40-42
- Day 2:** Luke 2:43-45
- Day 3:** Luke 2:46-47
- Day 4:** Luke 2:48-50
- Day 5:** Luke 2:51-52
- Day 6:** Psalm 122



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

JESUS GREW UP LIKE ALL OTHER HUMANS YET DISPLAYED AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORD OF GOD (LUKE 2:40-47).

Underline the ways Jesus grew as an ordinary boy.

Highlight the clues in the text that He was anything but ordinary.

40 The boy grew up and became strong, filled with wisdom, and God's grace was on him. **41** Every year his parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. **42** When he was twelve years old, they went up according to the custom of the festival. **43** After those days were over, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. **44** Assuming he was in the traveling party, they went a day's journey. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. **45** When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. **46** After three days, they found him in the temple sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. **47** And all those who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers.

When last we saw Jesus in Luke's Gospel, He was a baby in the temple being praised and proclaimed by Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:21-39). And within a couple of years, according to Matthew's Gospel, toddler Jesus was visited by the wise men (Matt. 2:1-12), after which He spent some time in Egypt before returning to the family's hometown in Nazareth (Matt. 2:19-23). We don't have any more inspired accounts of Jesus's first three decades except this one at the age of twelve. But we do have a brief summary that Jesus grew as a boy and experienced God's wisdom and grace, not an indication of sin but of God's favor (Luke 2:40).

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

JESUS'S HUMANITY: In addition to being fully divine, the Bible also affirms that Jesus is fully human. Not only does the Old Testament affirm that the Promised One (Messiah) would be a man (Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Mic. 5:3), but the New Testament also affirms that Jesus's earthly life bore all the marks of being a human being, such as hunger (Matt. 4:2), thirst (John 19:28), weariness (Matt. 8:24), sorrow (John 11:35), and pain (the crucifixion).

While Jesus was growing in His humanity, Luke also chose to highlight the faithfulness with which Joseph and Mary raised Jesus. In Jesus's early years, His parents trusted the Lord to guide them, whether through warnings by angels or through prophecies of God-fearing elders. Luke made sure to note that Jesus's parents brought Him to the Passover Festival in Jerusalem each year (vv. 41-42). By their obedience to the law of God, Jesus took part in the celebration of Passover as was required of every faithful Jew.

LEADER NOTE: At twelve years old (v. 42), Jesus was on the threshold of adulthood in Jewish custom. At thirteen, a boy would formally become what is now called "a son of the commandment" (Hebrew, Bar Mitzvah) and obligated to keep God's law for himself.¹ So while Jesus was still a child in the eyes of the community, this visit to Jerusalem for the Passover came on the cusp of His cultural maturity.

What are some benefits for children who have believing and faithful parents and mentors?

With the conclusion of the festival, the time came for the family to return home with their caravan of friends and family, but Jesus was not among them, as His parents discovered a day later. Backtracking to Jerusalem, on the third day, Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple listening and asking questions of the teachers there.

The interactions Jesus had with those who taught the Word of God left everyone amazed. Amazement surrounding Jesus was a trend earlier in Luke 2:18,33, and here it was no different as Jesus set Himself apart from other kids His age and even the adults in the temple. He revealed an uncanny understanding of the Scriptures as He asked and answered questions about it, no doubt prodding the teachers in their own understanding of the Word.

LEADER NOTE: The rabbinic teaching of Jesus's day involved an extensive use of questions from students. Jesus likely was not teaching in a scenario like this, but the way He was asking questions of the rabbis revealed His unique and true understanding of the Law and the Prophets.

What might keep you from growing in your understanding of the Scriptures?

JESUS ACKNOWLEDGED GOD AS HIS FATHER (LUKE 2:48-52).**Highlight Jesus's response to Mary and Joseph's question.**

48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." **49** "Why were you searching for me?" he asked them. "Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?" **50** But they did not understand what he said to them. **51** Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother kept all these things in her heart. **52** And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.

We can only imagine the level of fear Mary and Joseph felt at the thought of losing the Savior and Messiah (v. 11). They obviously were worried. But they were perplexed by where they found their Son. Jesus had stayed in the temple going on three days.

Young Jesus, the incarnate Word of God (John 1:1), remained in the temple to sit and discuss the written Word of God with the teachers there. Jesus wanted to be in His Father's house learning about His Father's work. But more than that, "it was necessary" for Jesus to be there (Luke 2:49), and Jesus believed His earthly parents should have known that. Mary and Joseph didn't understand what was going on, but Jesus was making it clear who is His chief authority—His heavenly Father.

LEADER NOTE: Verse 49 contains Jesus's first recorded words in Luke's Gospel. Here Jesus revealed both a gentle nature and a strong conviction to be about His Father's will. As Jesus would state later in John 6:38, He had not come to do His own will but the will of the Father who sent Him.

In what ways are you acknowledging God as your heavenly Father and your highest authority?

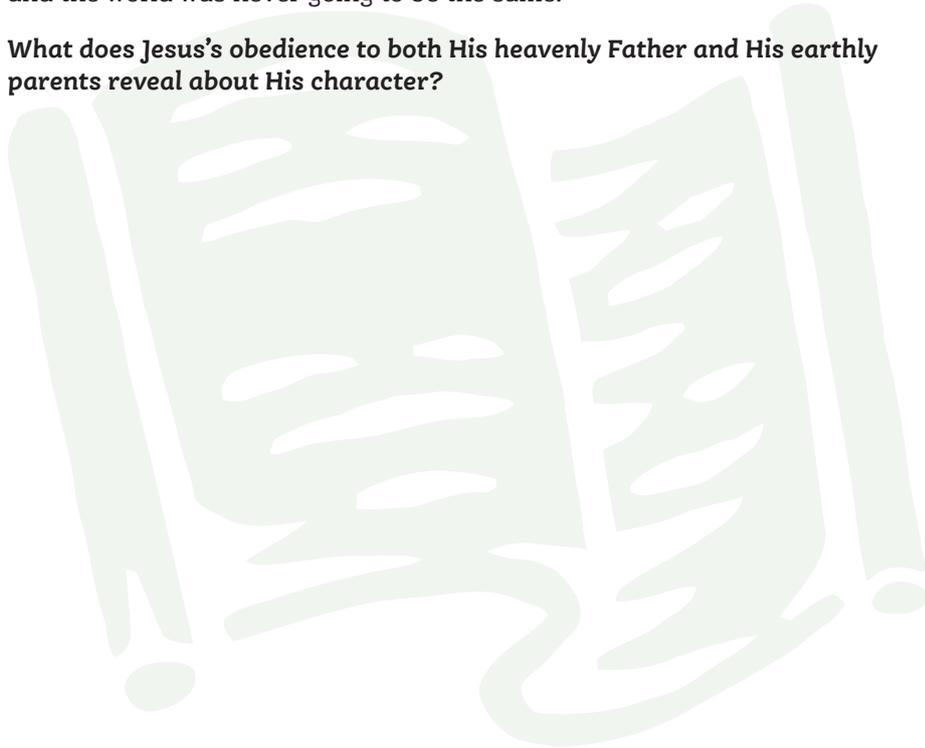
We find Jesus here in a bit of a conundrum. Jesus passionately yearned to learn more about His heavenly Father and to spend time in His house. But Jesus also was a Son to earthly parents whom He needed to honor and obey. Instead of arguing or making a scene as children often do, Jesus submitted to His earthly father and mother and went with them back to Nazareth. Mary and Joseph were not sinless parents—they were like us, sinners—but just as they had devoted themselves to obeying the law of God, Jesus obeyed the fifth commandment and honored His parents according to the Scriptures.

Key Concept: Jesus, who is fully human and fully God, is the source of wisdom and knowledge.

LEADER NOTE: The fact that Joseph and Mary were confused about Jesus's statement about being in His Father's house has more to do with Jesus's relationship to the Father than their relationship to Jesus. At this point, they could not fully understand what divine Sonship meant for Jesus in relation to the Father. Yet Luke said once again that Mary kept all of these things in her heart (Luke 2:19,51).

Jesus's character was beginning to stand out among the rest of humanity as He continued to grow physically, mentally, spiritually, and relationally. He loved both His heavenly Father and His earthly father and mother completely and fully. He had an understanding of the Word of God that did not make much earthly sense. He had a wisdom from above and favor with others that were steadily growing. The purpose of Jesus's incarnation was starting to take hold, and the world was never going to be the same.

What does Jesus's obedience to both His heavenly Father and His earthly parents reveal about His character?



GOSPEL CONNECTION

x

x

Jesus, the divine Son of God, honored and obeyed His earthly parents completely in fulfillment of the law of God so that He could be the perfect sacrifice for our sins in our place.

Notes

ARRIVAL

PLAY: Begin the group experience with a fun game. Invite three volunteers to the front of the room and give each volunteer four index cards and a pen. Say: “I’m going to give you a scenario, and I want you to write down the name of someone in our group whom you would ask for help in that situation because you know they have expertise in the area.” Call out scenarios such as “your car is making a rattling sound,” “your dog seems to be acting strangely,” “your toilet isn’t flushing properly,” “you’re not happy with your haircut,” or other skills you know people in your group have. Allow the rest of the group to guess the volunteers’ choices before they reveal their answer. After the names of potential experts are revealed, acknowledge the collective wisdom of your group.

TRANSITION: We might seek human wisdom and advice from people outside this group, and that’s fine. But sometimes we forget that God the Son came to earth as a human. Jesus is fully God and fully man, the source of wisdom and knowledge. We’ll consider how He exhibited that in today’s passage.

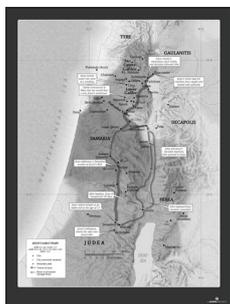
CONTEXT

REVIEW: (*Display Pack Item 2: Jesus’s Early Years, and use the map to help review previous sessions.*) Over the past few weeks, we’ve looked at Jesus’s early years, including His birth, His dedication at the temple, and the visit of the wise men, and today we look at His remaining in the temple without His parents’ knowledge. Each of these passages have pointed to His identity. There is no doubt that Jesus is fully God, but we must also remember that He is fully human and was being raised by parents who were fully human.

RECAP

ASK: What jumped out to you from the text as you studied this passage this week?

DISCUSS: It could be possible for some to read our core passage for today and conclude, “Jesus should have gotten in trouble for that!” But that would miss the purpose Luke had in recording in his Gospel this event with Jesus at twelve years old. So today, we’ll consider the following in our activity: What is the reason or reasons we should know and believe this passage from Luke 2?



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Key Concept: Jesus, who is fully human and fully God, is the source of wisdom and knowledge.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

CHART: Direct your group to page 48 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find the activity titled “Main Ideas.” Recreate this chart on a board in your room so you can record the group’s findings as they interact with the Scripture text.

Main Ideas	
Read the passages below and write a brief summary of the main idea of each passage.	
LUKE 2:40-47	LUKE 2:48-52

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Luke 2:40-47 aloud.

ENGAGE: Challenge your group to consider one verse that exemplifies the primary focus of this first passage. Ask: “Why did you choose that verse? What does this verse reveal about the identity of Jesus?” Write on the board the verse most chosen by the group. Then direct them back to their Bibles to consider how the rest of the passage reveals truth about humanity, specifically through the descriptions of Jesus’s parents. Ask: “How can you relate to the earthly, human concerns of Mary and Joseph? How does this passage point to Jesus’s identity as fully God?”

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Luke 2:48-52.

ENGAGE: Continue the activity by finding the verse that draws out the main idea of this section of the passage, writing the most prominent answer on the board. Guide your group to consider not only that Jesus identified Himself as

Notes

God's Son but that His life's goal was to be about His Father's will. As a group, consider what we can learn about ourselves by observing the words and reactions of Mary and Joseph.

RECAP: Guide your group to identify how Jesus's existence as fully God and fully human was revealed even in His childhood.

DEBRIEF

What should we learn about our Savior, ourselves, and how we ought to live from Jesus, His parents, and the teachers in this passage?

SUMMARIZE

Jesus is fully God and fully human. Even as a child, He possessed a holy understanding of God's Word and the desire to obey His heavenly Father. We, however, sin. We are limited, and we fail even in our best attempts at obeying the Lord. So we look to Jesus as our Savior to forgive us when we fall short of His righteous standard. *(Pass out copies of Pack Item 6: Jesus Is Human; highlight some points of significance for Jesus's incarnation, His taking on the flesh of humanity.)* When we consider that Jesus came in full humanity to save us as fallen human sinners, our only acceptable response is to worship Him.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

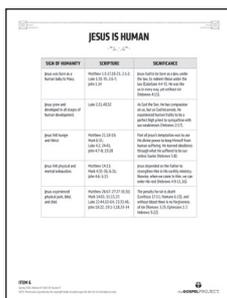
Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 49). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

 **HEAD:** Along with an emphasis on Jesus's relationship to the heavenly Father, we cannot overlook the relationship Jesus enjoyed with the earthly parents God gave Him. He cared for them and honored them in every way He could. Even at His crucifixion, which He endured in obedience to His Father's will, Jesus was still mindful to entrust His mother's care to His disciple John (John 19:26-27).

What are some ways you can honor God and your parents in this stage of your life?

 **HEART:** Jesus, the perfect Son of God, set an example for us in His pattern of growth even as a young child (Luke 2:52). He grew physically, as we all do naturally. But Jesus also grew in wisdom, and He grew relationally with God the Father and with other people. If the Son of God, who is without sin, took steps to ask questions and committed Himself to obedience to authority figures, how much more should we commit ourselves to grow in the same?

In what ways do you need to grow as a child of God and a disciple of Jesus?



Key Concept: Jesus, who is fully human and fully God, is the source of wisdom and knowledge.



HANDS: As a young boy, Jesus exhibited a wisdom beyond His years in His understanding of God's Word, and He grew in this aspect of life more and more. That's because the Son of God came into the world to "become wisdom from God for us" and to be "the wisdom of God" for our "righteousness, sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:24,30). So many people in this world go through life aimless and ignorant of the God who made and loves them. They need to hear the good news of the Savior, the perfect Son of God who came to do the Father's will so He could be our way to the Father.

How will you help others see Jesus as the source of wisdom and knowledge, especially for our salvation?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- As you read and study the Bible this week, continue finding a focal verse in each passage.
- Consider how you might keep all God reveals to you in His Word in your heart through journaling, Scripture memorization, and conversations.
- Prayerfully consider how you need to grow in your life of faith and in your relationships with God and others. Plan steps to help you do so.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 49 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 122:1-4 with your group, giving thanks to the Lord that you can gather in His house and learn from His Word, growing in wisdom and knowledge.

References

1. Robert H. Stein, Luke, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 121.

Notes



THE GOSPEL PROJECT

UNIT 20 THE PREPARATION



MATTHEW; LUKE; JOHN



MEMORY VERSES

“The devil said to him, ‘I will give you their splendor and all this authority, because it has been given over to me, and I can give it to anyone I want. If you, then, will worship me, all will be yours.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘It is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

—Luke 4:6-8



JOHN PREPARED THE WAY

CORE PASSAGE: MATTHEW 3:1-12

CONTEXT

Following the close of the Old Testament's inspiration and revelation, God was silent for over four hundred years. Then the angel Gabriel appeared to an old priest in Jerusalem and a young girl in Nazareth, informing them that God had not forgotten His promises. Decades later, John the Baptist, the surprise son of the priest, went into the wilderness to call people to repentance to prepare the way for the Messiah, the miraculous son of the young girl.

KEY CONCEPT

Following Jesus requires confession, repentance, and yielding to the work of the Holy Spirit.

As you examine Matthew 3:1-12:

- Notice that John the Baptist prepared the way for the Messiah by calling people to repentance.
- Reflect on John's humility in pointing toward Jesus, who was more powerful and more worthy.



TIMELINE

John the Baptist Is Born to Prepare the Way for the Messiah (Luke 1:57-80)

SESSION STUDY:
John the Baptist Calls People to Repentance in Preparation for Jesus (Matthew 3:1-12)

Jesus Is Tempted in the Wilderness (Luke 4:1-13)

Jesus, the Son of God, Is Born and Grows in Favor with God and Man (Luke 2:1-52)

John Baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13-17)

Daily Readings

- Day 1:** Mark 1:1-8
- Day 2:** Luke 3:1-14
- Day 3:** Luke 3:15-20
- Day 4:** Matthew 3:1-6
- Day 5:** Matthew 3:7-12
- Day 6:** Psalm 139



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

CONFESSION, REPENTANCE, AND BAPTISM ARE PART OF A BELIEVER'S JOURNEY (MATTHEW 3:1-6).

Circle the ways people demonstrated their repentance in this passage.

1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea **2** and saying, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" **3** For he is the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, who said: A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight! **4** Now John had a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. **5** Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were going out to him, **6** and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

John the Baptist's words in Matthew 3:1-2 were both earth-shattering and life-giving. The news of Jesus's arrival was more than a mere announcement; it was a call to respond. The moment had arrived; the long-awaited Messiah had come to save God's people from their sins. What was required now was the people's earnest confession and their heartfelt repentance.

John's message was plain in its content and yet rich in meaning and context. He proclaimed, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" (v. 2). John urged God's people to "repent," or "turn away," from their old, sinful ways of living. Jesus's arrival signified the in-breaking of God's kingdom predicted by Old Testament prophets centuries prior (v. 3). What is more, the coming of the Messiah represented not only a new chapter in redemptive history but also a new way of life for those who will trust and follow Him.

Why should repentance be a response to hearing the news of God's kingdom coming near?

John the Baptist was unconventional in his style of dress and dietary habits (v. 4). Yet in keeping with a pattern held throughout the Scriptures, God chose and used this unlikely individual to do incredible things for His kingdom.

LEADER NOTE: During a time when Jesus rebuked religious leaders who took pride in their long robes and high status among the people (Mark 12:38-40), John lived in the wilderness eating locusts and wild honey and dressing in camel's hair garments. John's behavior and dress brought to mind the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). Indeed, the prophet Malachi mentioned that God would send a prophet in the spirit of Elijah to prepare the way of the Lord (Mal. 4:5-6).

Key Concept: Following Jesus requires confession, repentance, and yielding to the work of the Holy Spirit.

John announced the arrival of the Messiah, and as droves of people began responding favorably to his message, he ministered to them, baptizing them in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins (vv. 5-6).

LEADER NOTE: John's baptism in Matthew 3 should not be confused with the Christian baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that marks off believers in Jesus after His crucifixion and resurrection. John's baptism here was closer to a ritual a Gentile would go through to identify with and join the people of Israel. Essentially, John was declaring that a Jew's heritage and obedience wouldn't save him; rather, the Lord looks favorably upon a person with a contrite and repentant heart.¹

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

"The force of that verb, repent, is no mere hat tip to the holiness of God with a mere acknowledgment of one's sin. The call here is to radical conversion—to turn from sin and intoxication with this world and direct one's soul and heart to the things of God."²

—R. C. Sproul (1939–2017)

In our day, the content of the gospel message and the urgent call to repentance remain the same. First John 1:9 reminds us that if we confess our sins, God is faithful to forgive us. In addition, we observe in Matthew 3 a precursor of the pattern new believers follow. After confessing our sins and trusting Christ for salvation, we follow through with Christian baptism, outwardly professing to the world what God by His Spirit has accomplished inwardly (Acts 2:38).

What is the relationship between repentance and confession of sins?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

John was the prophesied messenger calling out in the wilderness, preparing hearts to repent and believe in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Notes

THOSE WHO TRUST IN JESUS WILL BE GIVEN THE HOLY SPIRIT (MATTHEW 3:7-12).

Underline words or phrases that speak about the Pharisees and Sadducees and what will happen to them.

7 When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? **8** Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance. **9** And don’t presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones. **10** The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. **11** I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove his sandals. He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. **12** His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn. But the chaff he will burn with fire that never goes out.”

Not all who responded to John’s message responded in faith. The Pharisees and Sadducees were groups of Jewish religious leaders who prioritized strict adherence to the written law and often opposed the work of Jesus’s followers. When the groups arrived to observe John baptizing new followers, John immediately addressed their insincerity and questioned their motives.

These groups were well-studied in the Scriptures and came from rich religious traditions. They also were intrigued by the excitement surrounding John’s announcement. Yet they were not truly sorrowful over the sinful condition of their hearts, nor did they genuinely desire to turn from their sin and place their faith in the coming Messiah. Their sin included pride and a lack of love for those less fortunate. John warned the groups not to assume their religious tradition and lineage would save them from God’s impending wrath (vv. 8-9). They would need to demonstrate a true change of heart, evidenced by the “fruit” of changed lives (v. 8), even though from the outside it may have seemed like were God-fearers.

LEADER NOTE: The Sadducees were Jewish aristocrats who believed only the first five books of the Bible were authoritative. The Pharisees accepted the authority of all the Old Testament writings, and they also believed in the resurrection, angels, and demons, contrary to the Sadducees. Both groups often argued with Jesus and demanded a sign of His authority to perform miracles or to preach. They were the religious leaders of the day and seen as those to look to for moral authority. But Jesus knew their hearts were hard and prideful.

Why should we not minimize the severity of sin (especially ones surrounding the corruption of the heart), and God’s response to it?

As has been demonstrated throughout the Scriptures, God will not be mocked, nor does He deal gently with those who come to Him dishonestly. John reminded the two groups of this fact and pointed to the greater story unfolding around them. There was no question: God will judge those who remain unrepentant in their sin (vv. 10,12). The need of the hour—this very hour—is the need to turn from sin and turn to Christ.

But John’s ministry was a precursor to the ministry of someone even greater who had now come—Jesus, the promised Messiah. While baptism with water, performed by John, served as an outward sign of inward change, faith in Jesus results in God granting to believers the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (v. 11). In contrast to outward conformity and external conditions, it is the presence of the Spirit and His “fruit” in one’s life that characterizes true belief.

LEADER NOTE: Fruit is often used as a metaphor for the evidence of true faith (Matt. 3:10; 7:17-19; John 15:2-5; Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 5:9-10; Jas. 3:17). In an agricultural setting, John and Jesus’s audience would easily understand that only healthy, mature trees produce good fruit. The Holy Spirit dwells within each believer and helps us grow into Christ-likeness as we participate in spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, fellowship, evangelism, and more.

What “fruit” would you expect to see from a believer in Jesus because of the Holy Spirit’s presence?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

BAPTISM: Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer’s death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord’s Supper.

ARRIVAL

INTERACT: As the group arrives, invite them to share how they prepare for the arrival of an important guest. Do they have a certain routine? Do they like to plan ahead, or do they prefer to plan just before time? How is preparing for the arrival of an important guest different from preparing for the arrival of someone you know well?

TRANSITION: Most of us would go to great lengths to make preparations for the arrival of an important guest. And when the most important person in human history—the Messiah—was due to arrive, God raised up John the Baptist to prepare His way with the people.

CONTEXT

SAY: God's purpose for John's ministry was to pave the way for Jesus. John was tasked with exhorting people to turn to God. The Jewish people had not had a fresh revelation from God in a few centuries. In that time, they became heavily focused on obtaining independence from Rome. Military prowess and a strong national identity had become more important than having a heart of obedience toward the Lord. God used John to remind the Jews that a broken heart and a contrite spirit were what He desired (Ps. 51:17).

RECAP

RECAP: Invite a couple of volunteers to share a key idea that stood out to them as they prepared this week.

SAY: John the Baptist knew that his purpose was to prepare the way for the Messiah. Prior to the beginning of Jesus's ministry, John became a well-known preacher as he went throughout the wilderness of Judea preaching of the need for repentance. Many people's hearts were stirred to hear his message as people from all over the area came to hear him preach and were baptized.

TRANSITION: Today we are going to discuss our need to prepare our hearts through confession, repentance, and obedience to His direction for Jesus to have His way in our lives. From here, let's list ways that John prepared the way for Jesus.



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Key Concept: Following Jesus requires confession, repentance, and yielding to the work of the Holy Spirit.

GROUP ACTIVITY

LIST: Direct the group to page 58 in the Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find the activity titled “Preparing for Jesus.” Recreate this list on a board in the room and record the group’s findings as they discuss the Scripture text.

Notes

Preparing for Jesus

Using Matthew 3:1-12, write down ways John prepared the people for Jesus. Reflect on how preparation of our hearts matters when approaching God.

MATTHEW 3:1-2

MATTHEW 3:5-10

MATTHEW 3:11

MATTHEW 3:12

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 3:1-12.

ENGAGE: Using verses 1-2, encourage the group to discuss what John meant by saying people should repent because the kingdom of heaven is near. (*Jesus represented the kingdom of heaven in coming to earth, so John was signifying that Jesus’s ministry was about to begin.*) Write down their thoughts on the board. Ask: “Why is repentance necessary for us to come near to God? How do confession and repentance pave the way for God to work in our hearts?”

DIRECT: Using verses 5-10, lead the group to review how people responded to John’s preaching and how he encouraged them to confess their sin. Discuss that baptism in Jesus’s time was generally used for Gentiles who wanted to convert to the Jewish faith, yet John preached that the Jews also needed to repent and be baptized.

SAY: Sin separates us from God, but drawing near to God through confessing our sins and turning the other direction in faith prepares the way for God

to work in our hearts. As we submit to Him, He will begin to direct our lives according to His plan. He will reveal to us His purpose for us. Ultimately that purpose is to help spread His kingdom on earth.

DISCUSS: Using verse 11, lead the group to consider the importance of Christian baptism as an outward symbol of what the Holy Spirit is doing on the inside. Say: “Baptism is an important step of obedience in the life of every believer, but it is not what saves. Only faith in Jesus saves.”

ENGAGE: Using verse 12, invite your group to focus on John’s paramount mission: to point people to Jesus. Say: “As believers, we know that when Jesus comes again, He will come in judgment. So while we wait for Jesus to return, we must spread the gospel with urgency as John did.”

DEBRIEF

What are ways we can assess the condition of our heart so that we can repent of what might be corrupted there?

SUMMARIZE

John the Baptist preached that God’s kingdom was at hand. God’s kingdom includes His presence, both in the incarnation of Jesus Christ and in His presence now dwelling in the hearts of Christians through the power of the Holy Spirit. Having heard, believed, and experienced this good news, we believers should have a heart of repentance over our sin even as we call others to repent and believe in Jesus, who embodied God’s kingdom on earth.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 59). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week’s study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: Upon hearing the gospel, we are confronted with the Bible’s description of the sinful state of our own hearts. John the Baptist, and ultimately Jesus, offered the solution to our sin problem: repent. Instead of resting on their identity as children of Abraham, John told his listeners to recognize their need for the coming Savior.

What are some obstacles that may keep people from repenting of their sin?



HEART: Confession of sin and proclaiming Christ as Savior involve more than merely a change of mind; our affections must begin to change too. In a world that tempts us to love the things it loves, the Holy Spirit encourages us to love the things God loves and to resist the things that displease God.

How will you pray for the Lord to change your affections so that you love Christ more than your sin?

Key Concept: Following Jesus requires confession, repentance, and yielding to the work of the Holy Spirit.



HANDS: It is not enough merely to know what repentance is or to know that we should confess. The practice of confession should be a regular rhythm within the Christian life. A mature, godly friend could be a listening ear and a source of encouragement as you follow Christ.

What steps will you take to repent of and combat sin in your life?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Read John 1:1-18 and reflect on the moment you repented and believed in Jesus. Consider your current relationship with Christ and ask God to reveal to you any areas in which you need to confess and repent.
- Read Matthew 6:9-13. Consider how you need to pray for and respond to God's kingdom and your struggle with various temptations.
- Reflect on how you are actively participating in spreading God's kingdom on earth. How can you focus more on spreading the good news of Jesus Christ?

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 59 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

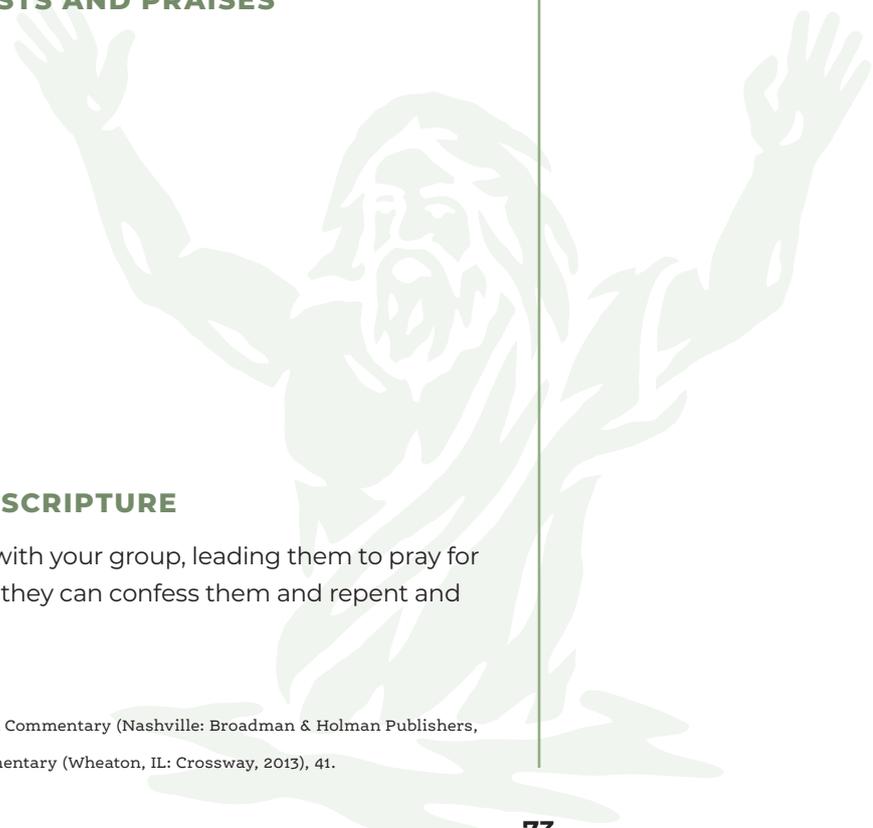
PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 139:23-24 with your group, leading them to pray for the Lord to identify their sinful ways so they can confess them and repent and obey the Lord more faithfully.

References

1. Craig L. Blomberg, Matthew, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992) [Logos].
2. R. C. Sproul, Matthew, St. Andrew's Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 41.

Notes



JESUS WAS BAPTIZED

CORE PASSAGE: MATTHEW 3:13-17

CONTEXT

Jesus's baptism in the Jordan River followed on the heels of John the Baptist's announcement concerning the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah. John's ministry was the fulfillment of various Old Testament prophecies concerning a "forerunner," one who was to come before the Messiah announcing His arrival and calling God's people to repent from their sins.

KEY CONCEPT

Jesus, the Second Person of the divine Trinity, set an example for us in humility.

As you examine Matthew 3:13-17:

- Understand that though He is sinless, Jesus knew His baptism would validate both His and John's ministry.
- Recognize that a voice—the Father—called Jesus His beloved Son and gave evidence of His authority.



TIMELINE

John the Baptist Is Born to Prepare the Way for the Messiah (Luke 1:57-80)

John the Baptist Calls People to Repentance in Preparation for Jesus (Matthew 3:1-12)

Jesus Is Tempted in the Wilderness (Luke 4:1-13)

Jesus, the Son of God, Is Born and Grows in Favor with God and Man (Luke 2:1-52)

SESSION STUDY: John Baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River
(Matthew 3:13-17)

Jesus Calls Disciples to Follow Him (John 1:35-51)

Daily Readings

- Day 1:** Mark 1:9-11
- Day 2:** Luke 3:21-38
- Day 3:** Matthew 3:13-17
- Day 4:** John 1:1-18
- Day 5:** John 1:19-34
- Day 6:** Psalm 146



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

JESUS SET AN EXAMPLE FOR US IN BAPTISM (MATTHEW 3:13-15).

As you read the passage below, circle any words or phrases that are repeated.

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. **14** But John tried to stop him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?” **15** Jesus answered him, “Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John allowed him to be baptized.

This passage represents a pivotal moment in Jesus’s life: the inauguration of Jesus’s public ministry, confirmed in the act of baptism. These verses lay important groundwork for considering the truth about Jesus’s identity as the Son of God, the extent of His obedience to the Father, and the nature of His mission on earth.

LEADER NOTE: Jesus’s baptism marked the beginning of His official ministry. Of course, as the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son has been active in the course of human events since the beginning. All the world was created and is sustained through Him (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16-17). But in His incarnation, Jesus refrained from any form of public ministry until this point in His life, around the age of thirty. Quietly, Jesus had lived in Galilee for most of His upbringing, where it seems He learned His earthly father’s trade: carpentry. He obeyed His parents and He obeyed the law of God. Now Jesus would fulfill the purpose for which His heavenly Father sent Him.

The scene opens along the banks of the Jordan River, where John the Baptist has been busy baptizing those who responded to his announcement concerning the arrival of the Messiah. But things took an unexpected turn when Jesus Himself showed up and, to John’s great surprise, requested to be baptized.

What reasons might John have had to stop Jesus from being baptized by him?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Jesus needed to be fully God and fully human to be able to save humanity. As the Second Person of the one triune God, He humbled Himself to dwell among us and to identify Himself with sinful humanity, yet He was without sin.

Key Concept: Jesus, the Second Person of the divine Trinity, set an example for us in humility.

Initially John was hesitant with Jesus's request. He was aware of the gravity of the moment and of his own unworthiness to perform the task. What is more, John understood that the power and authority to forgive sins rested with Jesus alone. So Jesus, John thought, should be baptizing him! Upon Jesus's insistence, however, that His baptism by John was necessary in order to fulfill an aspect of God's redemptive plan, John obliged and would baptize Jesus.

In partaking in the act of John's baptism, Jesus would "fulfill all righteousness" and fully embrace the mission for which He was sent into the world (Matt. 3:15). Jesus, being the perfect Son of God, did not need to repent of sin, so that was not His purpose in this baptism. But being the One sent to save us from our sin, Jesus identified Himself with repentant sinners in this act. He humbled Himself to become like us so that we might be saved and exalted with Him.

LEADER NOTE: Christian baptism, distinct from John's baptism for repentance, is the act of immersing an individual in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit following one's profession of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation (Matt. 28:19). Baptism itself, a picture of Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection, does not save an individual. Rather, it is the public announcement of God's saving work in an individual's life, accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit. In accordance with the Scriptures, baptism is one of two ordinances practiced by a local church, the other being the Lord's Supper.

What should we learn and emulate from Jesus's example in being baptized by John?

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

"Our culture seeks validation through achievement. Jesus, however, shows us that true validation comes through obedience to the Father's will, even if that means taking a lower place or associating with the 'wrong crowd.'"¹

—Mike Leake

Notes

Notes



SCAN ME

Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to dig deeper into the harmony of the Gospel accounts of Jesus's baptism and temptation.

JESUS'S BAPTISM DISPLAYS THE TRIUNE GOD (MATTHEW 3:16-17).

Circle the specific mentions of the distinct Persons of the Trinity.

16 When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. **17** And a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased."

The doctrine of the Trinity—the belief in one God who exists in three distinct Persons—is arguably the most foundational belief of the Christian faith. The Bible contains no mention of the word "Trinity," yet the pages of Scripture are filled with evidence of God's triune identity.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

GOD IS ONE IN THREE PERSONS: While the Bible affirms that God is one (Mark 12:29; 1 Cor. 8:4-6), it also affirms that God exists as three Persons—Father, Son, and Spirit. Each Person of the Trinity is fully divine—the Father is God (John 6:27), the Son is God (Phil. 2), the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4)—and each Person is distinct from the others (Matt. 11:27; John 10:30; 14:16). This perfect unity within the three Persons of the Trinity is a first-order doctrine.

The record of Jesus's baptism is one of the clearest and most-referenced examples in the Bible of God's triune identity and activity. Jesus, the Son and the Second Person of the Trinity, was baptized. Immediately following the Son's baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him and the Father's voice was heard from heaven.

LEADER NOTE: As Jesus resurfaced after being immersed in the water of the Jordan River, the heavens opened for Him. In Scripture, the heavens being "opened" signals divine activity (Ezek. 1:1; Isa. 64:1; Acts 7:56; Rev. 19:11). In this moment, all three Persons of the Trinity were working in concert to initiate Jesus's earthly ministry.

Why is it significant that all three Persons of the Trinity were active at Jesus's baptism?

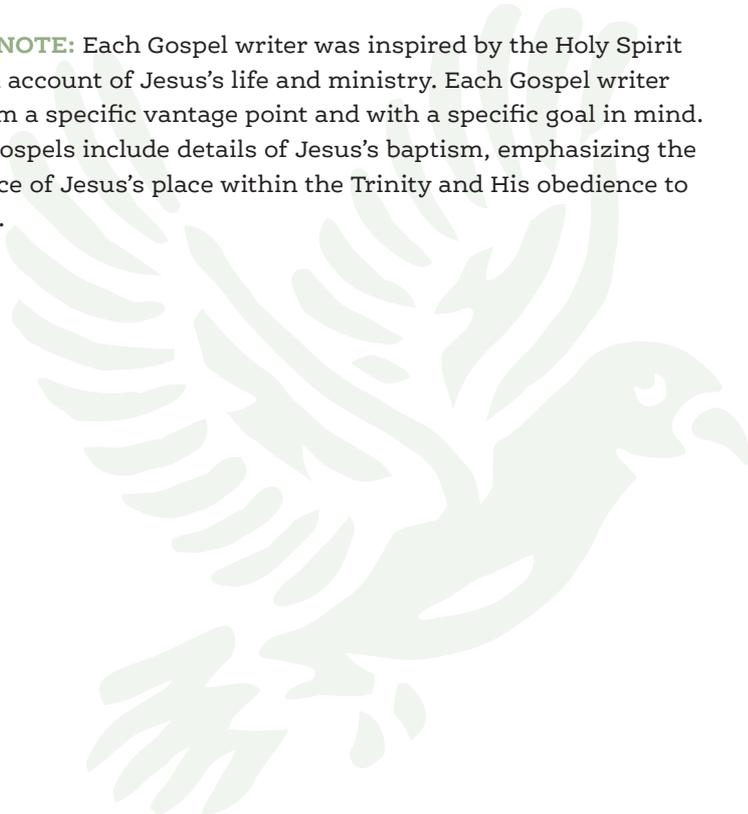
Key Concept: Jesus, the Second Person of the divine Trinity, set an example for us in humility.

Jesus's baptism inaugurated His earthly ministry and served as confirmation of His identity as the Messiah, the Son of God and the Second Person of the Trinity sent on mission to save people from their sins. The voice of the Father, heard as Jesus emerged from the waters, was key in confirming Jesus's identity as the One chosen and sent to fulfill God's redemptive purposes.

What does it mean to be well-pleasing to God?

The Holy Spirit's descent upon Jesus also served as confirmation of Jesus's messianic identity. The Gospel of John recorded the baptism event in greater detail from John the Baptist's perspective. There we find it previously had been revealed to John that the Messiah would be the One upon whom the Spirit descended and rested (John 1:32-34). The events surrounding Jesus's baptism confirmed for John the nature of Jesus's identity and His mission. Observing the activity of our triune God at Jesus's baptism through our reading of Scripture serves to bolster our confidence as those who believe today.

LEADER NOTE: Each Gospel writer was inspired by the Holy Spirit to give an account of Jesus's life and ministry. Each Gospel writer wrote from a specific vantage point and with a specific goal in mind. All four Gospels include details of Jesus's baptism, emphasizing the importance of Jesus's place within the Trinity and His obedience to God's will.



Notes

Notes

ARRIVAL

INTERACT: As the group arrives, invite participants to share about a time someone in a higher-ranking position demonstrated humility by serving them in some way. Ask: “How did you feel when that person served you? Did you protest or refuse to be served? Why did that act feel like a reversal of order?”

CONTEXT

SAY: John the Baptist began to fulfill His God-given purpose by preparing the way for Jesus’s ministry. He did so by calling people to repentance and baptizing them as a symbol of turning away from sin and choosing to walk in obedience to God. John existed to call people to prepare for the Lord’s coming. And then one day, Jesus arrived, but He showed up at the Jordan River with a surprising request.

RECAP

RECAP: Invite your group to share a key idea that stood out to them as they prepared this week.

SAY: John the Baptist protested when Jesus requested to be baptized. *(Pass out copies of Pack Item 7: Jesus Is God, and point out what John knew about Jesus: He was preexistent and He is the Lord.)* He knew that Jesus is the Messiah. John recognized that Jesus was of a higher authority than him, and he did not think it was necessary nor appropriate for Jesus to be baptized by him. Baptizing Jesus would be a reversal of order in John’s estimation, not to mention that Jesus did not need to repent of sin. Even though Jesus was of a higher authority than John, Jesus demonstrated humility by asking John to baptize Him. He showed that He was choosing submission to the Father’s will.

TRANSITION: From here, let’s compare the roles of John, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God the Father in Jesus’s baptism.



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Key Concept: Jesus, the Second Person of the divine Trinity, set an example for us in humility.

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

LIST: Direct the group to page 66 in the Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find the activity titled “Roles in Jesus’s Baptism.” Recreate the list on a board and record the group’s findings as they discuss the Scripture text.

Roles in Jesus’s Baptism

Using Matthew 3:13-17, identify each person’s or Person’s role in Jesus’s baptism.

GOD THE FATHER

GOD THE SON (JESUS)

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

JOHN THE BAPTIST

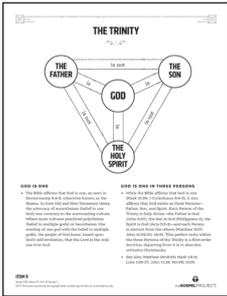
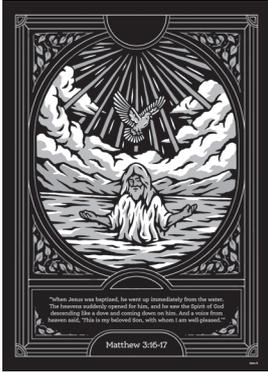
READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 3:13-17.

IDENTIFY: Form four smaller groups and instruct each group to use the text to identify and write down each person’s role in Jesus’s baptism. After a few minutes, regroup and talk through the groups’ findings.

ENGAGE: Focus on John the Baptist’s role in verses 13-15. Say: “Put yourself in John’s shoes for a moment. You know who Jesus is, and yet, Jesus surprises you by coming forward to be baptized.” Ask: “Why do you think John expected Jesus to baptize him?” Jesus Himself never baptized anyone, though His disciples did (John 4:1-2). John mentioned in the previous passage that his baptism with water was ultimately inferior to Jesus’s baptism with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11).

ENGAGE: Now focus on Jesus’s role in verses 13,15-16. Ask: “Why did Jesus ask John to baptize Him?” *(to fulfill all righteousness [v. 15])* “Why would Jesus say that, already being completely righteous as the perfect, sinless Son of God?” Clarify that Jesus did not need to become more righteous. Through baptism, Jesus declared outwardly His perfect obedience to God the Father in identifying with the sinners He came to save.

Notes



DISCUSS: Display **Pack Item 8: The Trinity** (poster) and pass out copies of **Pack Item 9: The Trinity** (handout). Briefly review the triune nature of God and the Persons of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Point out the affirmation of Jesus's and John's ministries by the response of God the Father and God the Spirit in verses 16-17. Ask: "How was the Spirit's role one of identification (John 1:32-34) as well as anointing and empowering (Luke 4:16-21)? Who needed to hear that God the Father was well-pleased with the Son of God: Jesus, John the Baptist, the disciples, or us?"

DEBRIEF

How did Jesus humble Himself in this scene?

What are some ways we can humble ourselves and walk in obedience to God?

SUMMARIZE

Some of the people John preached to were religious leaders whose hearts were far from God. They were more concerned about the outward appearance of perfect sacrifice to God rather than humble repentance. Jesus's act of obedience demonstrated that having a heart of humility toward God is more important than external sacrifices, as was affirmed by the Holy Spirit and God the Father in their roles in Jesus's baptism. Likewise, humility matched with obedience in our lives will please our God and Savior.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 67). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

 **HEAD:** Often we isolate our thinking about God to only one Person of the Trinity: the Father cares for us or the Son gave His life for us or the Spirit works to guide, convict, and comfort us (or's instead of and's). Yet our triune God is completely invested in our salvation and sanctification.

How is each Person of the Trinity significant and active in your life?

 **HEART:** Baptism signifies the spiritual change brought about in a person's life by the work of our triune God. Yet while we live on earth, the presence of temptation and sin remains a constant struggle. Our God remains steadfast in His commitment to us as we seek to live faithfully in light of His instruction. The Holy Spirit helps us resist sin and pursue holiness in humility.

What significant changes has Christ made in your life as you continue to walk with Him?

Key Concept: Jesus, the Second Person of the divine Trinity, set an example for us in humility.



HANDS: Jesus was baptized by John “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15), and throughout the course of His life, culminating in His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus obeyed the Father and accomplished a perfect righteousness, which He bestows on any and all who believe in Him for salvation. Jesus’s example of humility in His life, including in His baptism, challenges us to live with that same kind of humility. Jesus truly laid down His life and privileges in order to save us. So we should respond with humility and an obedience that humbly reflects the perfect righteousness He has been granted to us by faith.

What are some ways you will set aside your privileges to obey the Lord and humbly serve others?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Believer’s baptism is an important step in the lives of everyone who has trusted in Jesus. If this is an area of your life in which you need to submit to the Lord, reach out to a pastor or group leader to discuss the next steps.
- Like John the Baptist, consider how you need to set aside your expectations in order to obey the Lord in humility and faithfulness.
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. Reflect on Jesus’s righteousness that was imputed to you when you repented of sin and trusted in Jesus. Now read verses 18-20. Go and tell someone this week how to be reconciled to God.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 67 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 146:1-5 with your group. Thank God our salvation is found through faith alone in Jesus, the perfect Son of God who reigns forever.

References

1. Mike Leake, “Jesus Was Baptized,” *The Gospel Project for Adults Commentary* (Spring 2026): 77.

Notes

JESUS WAS TEMPTED

CORE PASSAGE: LUKE 4:1-13

CONTEXT

Following the glorious affirmation of the Father for the Son at Jesus's baptism, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert, where He fasted for forty days and was eventually tempted by Satan. Jesus's responses to three specific temptations demonstrated both His commitment to God's will and His readiness for the ministry task before Him.

KEY CONCEPT

Like Jesus, we can turn to Scripture to help us resist temptation.

As you examine Luke 4:1-13:

- Reflect on the truth that Jesus, being human, experienced temptation just as we do.
- Identify the means Jesus used to resist temptation and to obey the Father.



TIMELINE

John the Baptist Calls People to Repentance in Preparation for Jesus (Matthew 3:1-12)

SESSION STUDY:
Jesus Is Tempted in the Wilderness (Luke 4:1-13)

Jesus Performs His First Miracle at the Wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11)

John Baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13-17)

Jesus Calls Disciples to Follow Him (John 1:35-51)

Daily Readings

- Day 1:** Mark 1:12-13
- Day 2:** Matthew 4:1-4
- Day 3:** Matthew 4:5-11
- Day 4:** Luke 4:1-4
- Day 5:** Luke 4:5-13
- Day 6:** Psalm 141



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

**WE ARE EASILY TEMPTED WHEN OUR NEEDS ARE UNMET,
BUT WE CAN RESIST (LUKE 4:1-4).**

Highlight the details from the narrative that led Jesus to be tempted.

1 Then Jesus left the Jordan, full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness **2** for forty days to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over, he was hungry. **3** The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” **4** But Jesus answered him, “It is written: Man must not live on bread alone.”

Following His baptism, Jesus departed from the Jordan River, and Luke said He was “full of the Holy Spirit” (v. 1). Not only had the Spirit descended upon Jesus after He emerged from the water after His baptism, but the Spirit’s indwelling presence was now with Him as He continued preparing for His earthly ministry.

The Holy Spirit also led Jesus into the wilderness for a time of fasting and for the explicit purpose of being tested—tempted—by Satan. The Spirit’s involvement in Jesus’s time in the desert clues readers into the spiritual dynamics at play in Jesus’s earthly ministry. Spiritual warfare is the reality for all those who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior. Luke highlighted the spiritual warfare in this passage by recounting Jesus’s interaction with Satan after His time spent fasting.

LEADER NOTE: When Satan said, “If you are the Son of God . . .” (v. 3), he was not tempting Jesus to cast doubt on His relationship to God the Father. That would be absurd. Jesus has always been God’s Son and has always existed in perfect unity with His Father. Satan was tempting Jesus to assert His own will as God the Son to meet His needs instead of following God’s plan for redemption.

Why do you think God’s plan for our redemption included Jesus facing temptation?

For forty days, Jesus fasted from food, experiencing in His human body intense hunger. Therefore, Jesus was in a particularly vulnerable position as Satan seized upon the opportunity, telling Jesus that He could command a stone to become bread and His hunger could be satisfied. Indeed, Jesus could turn a stone into bread; later He would turn water into wine (John 2:1-11), but Jesus combated Satan’s temptation by citing truth found in God’s Word, namely, that “man must not live on bread alone” (Luke 4:4; cf. Deut. 8:3).

Key Concept: Like Jesus, we can turn to Scripture to help us resist temptation.

Notes

How does Jesus’s response challenge your view of where true sustenance comes from?

As believers, we too will continue to face temptation as we seek to live obediently to God, especially in moments when we are in need. When we believe the gospel, we recognize that we are free from the penalty and punishment of our sin. Thankfully, by God’s grace, we are also free from sin’s power over us. Yet we still battle with the presence of sin in our lives. Like Jesus, we must rely upon God’s Word in our fight against sin. God also gives us the Holy Spirit, who helps by assuring us of our salvation and empowering us in our fight against sin that remains present in our lives.

LEADER NOTE: In addition to convicting us of remaining sin (John 16:8), the Holy Spirit empowers us to fight against sin, to resist temptation, and to flee from our spiritual enemy (Rom. 8:12-17). By God’s grace and walking with the Spirit, we are able to resist sin and put sin to death. As believers, we often will face temptation to sin, yet the Lord does not leave us to face our struggles alone.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

TEMPTATION AND SIN: Temptation is not the equivalent of sin. Temptation can refer to natural and good desires that are twisted and directed toward pleasing of self rather than giving glory to God. Jesus was tempted like we are (Matt. 4), and yet, He never sinned but faithfully resisted temptation and followed the will of His Father. Knowing our weakness, we are to be on guard against temptation that may lead us to sin (Matt. 26:41), and we pray for God to deliver us from evil (Matt. 6:13).

TRUSTING GOD AND RELYING ON HIS WORD CAN HELP US RESIST TEMPTATION (LUKE 4:5-13).

Underline phrases that indicate Jesus’s appeal to Scripture in His responses to Satan.

5 So he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. **6** The devil said to him, “I will give you their splendor and all this authority, because it has been given over to me, and I can give it to anyone I want. **7** If you, then, will worship me, all will be yours.” **8** And Jesus answered him, “It is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.” **9** So he took him to Jerusalem, had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. **10** For it is written: He will give his angels orders concerning you, to protect you, **11** and they will support you with their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” **12** And Jesus answered him, “It is said: Do not test the Lord your God.” **13** After the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.

Jesus was tempted by Satan two more times in the wilderness. In one, the devil took Jesus to a high place on a mountain, a vantage point from which they could see all the kingdoms on earth. Claiming authority over them, Satan offered Jesus the “splendor” of the kingdoms and the opportunity to rule over them, and Satan’s trade-off was straightforward: Jesus would only need to worship him (vv. 6-7).

Satan’s words were filled with lies and deceit, and Jesus recognized his scheme at once. The crux of the matter was not merely splendor and power over kingdoms. Satan aimed at Jesus’s heart and desired the worship that belongs to God alone. What’s more, Satan’s temptation represented a shortcut away from the ultimate goal of Jesus’s mission—the cross.

LEADER NOTE: When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden, humanity, whom God had given dominion over the earth, fell under the slavery of sin. But Jesus faced every temptation that humans face and yet never sinned in thought, word, or deed. Because of His sinless life and sacrificial death on the cross to take away the penalty of sin, we can be reconciled to God. After His death and resurrection, all authority was given to Jesus, and He has commanded His followers to go and rescue others from Satan’s grip (Matt. 28:18-20).

What are some ways we are tempted to take shortcuts to avoid suffering in our mission to take the gospel of Jesus to the world?

Key Concept: Like Jesus, we can turn to Scripture to help us resist temptation.

Jesus responded to Satan by quoting Deuteronomy 6:13, reaffirming that God alone is worthy of worship. Again, Jesus countered Satan’s lies with truth found in God’s Word, wielding the Scriptures as a weapon in the fight against temptation and sin.

LEADER NOTE: Once more we see that Jesus wielded the truth of Scripture in His fight against temptation and sin, and we should do the same. The world is consistently vying for our affections, and we often are led away from worshipping God alone, tempted by deceitful claims and lies. Therefore, it is important that we continually steep ourselves in the truth found in the Word of God so that when temptation comes, we can rely upon God’s Word as a way out.

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

“The Bible in the memory is better than the Bible in the bookcase.”¹

–Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

In another attempt at tempting Christ, Satan brought Jesus to another high place, the temple pinnacle, and challenged Jesus to throw Himself down from it. This challenge was consistent with Satan’s customary subversive tactics because of an added twist—Satan quoted Scripture, referencing Psalm 91:11-12 to justify the temptation. If everyone saw Jesus jump and angels keep Him from hitting the ground, no one could deny Jesus is God’s Son, right? Jesus, however, was not persuaded. He recognized the temptation as an attempt to manipulate God to act. “Do not test the Lord your God,” Jesus replied, quoting Deuteronomy 6:16.

What Scriptures have helped you avoid temptation and sin in your life?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Jesus was tempted as we are, yet He resisted the devil’s temptations and remained without sin. Thus, He was the blameless sacrifice needed to atone for our sins.

Notes

ARRIVAL

PREPARE: Pass out blank note cards to each person as they arrive. Ask them to write down things that tempt them to sin, whether it be overindulging in alcohol, social media, or food, for example, or other temptations like rage or filthy language. Note that this is for their own personal use and won't be shared.

ENGAGE: After everyone has had time to write, ask, "Why are temptations so inviting? What is that sinister voice in your head saying?" Invite them to discuss what is so appealing about temptation. Lead them to share what helps them to avoid giving in to temptation. Ask: "Why is resisting temptation so challenging?" Tell the group that they can keep this card in a common place so that they can be reminded to resist these temptations in their lives.

CONTEXT

SAY: We've seen that Jesus, who is the divine Son of God, took on human flesh to become like us in order to save us. He was born as a human child to Mary, and through His earthly parents and His own actions, Jesus obeyed the law of God perfectly. He also grew physically, mentally, emotionally, and relationally. And as part of the fullness of His human experience, Jesus experienced temptation while on earth (Heb. 4:15). After His baptism but prior to the start of His public ministry, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into a series of temptations by Satan.

RECAP

DISCUSS: Based on your personal preparation this week, how would you categorize the temptations Jesus experienced in the wilderness in our passage for today? (*For example: Satan tried to appeal to Jesus through temptation regarding hunger, pride, and greed.*) What might have been Satan's purpose in tempting Jesus? (*If Satan could lead Jesus into sin, then he could keep all of humankind separated from God, just as he attempted to do in the garden of Eden [Gen. 3].*)

TRANSITION: Satan's will is to steal, kill, and destroy (cf. John 10:10) as he prowls around like a roaring lion looking for those he can devour (1 Pet. 5:8). But God's will sent Jesus to become the better Adam, One who could resist temptation and reconcile all people to God (1 Cor. 15:22). Today we are going to discuss how Jesus resisted sin when He was tempted so we can follow in His steps when we are tempted.



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Key Concept: Like Jesus, we can turn to Scripture to help us resist temptation.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

CHART: Direct the group to page 74 in the Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart with the headings “Internal Desires” and “External Influences.” Recreate the chart on a board in the room and record the group’s findings as they discuss the Scripture passages.

Deliver Us from Temptation

Read the passages below. Record insights on how internal desires and external influences tempt us and how we can resist those temptations.

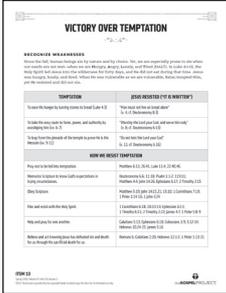
INTERNAL DESIRES	EXTERNAL INFLUENCES
Romans 6:11-14	Luke 22:31-32
Galatians 5:17,19-21	Luke 23:33-39
Ephesians 2:1-3	Ephesians 6:10-18
James 1:12-15	1 Peter 5:8-9

ANALYZE: Divide the group into two teams. Assign one team the “Internal Desires” column; assign the other team the “External Influences” column. Instruct the groups to read the verses and to analyze how temptation comes from our own sinful desires and/or external temptations and to note ways we can resist temptation. After a few minutes, regroup and discuss their findings. Record these on the board and encourage them to do the same in their PSG. Say: “Let’s see how our experience with temptation compares to Jesus’s.”

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Luke 4:1-13.

SAY: Scripture is clear that we fallen human beings struggle with temptation and sin because of our own sinful desires and the sinful influences around us. While Jesus never sinned, He was tempted as we are (Heb. 4:14-16), and He fought against temptation in the same way we should.

Notes



DISCUSS: Lead the group to discuss the difference between temptation and sin. Ask: “Are temptation and sin the same thing? How are they different?” Temptation is not the same as sin because a person can be tempted to sin without actually sinning, though external temptations often connect with our internal sinful desires. For Jesus to experience the fullness of humanity, He had to go through temptation like all humans, yet He never sinned. In this He set an example for our own victory over temptation. Even better, though, He defeated sin and death on the cross. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 10: Victory over Temptation** and discuss ways to resist temptation when it comes up in our lives.

DEBRIEF

How does Scripture help us to resist temptation?

What are some ways we can use Scripture proactively in the battle against temptation and sin?

SUMMARIZE

Through Adam, sin entered the world and brought death to humankind. Now people continually struggle with giving in to temptation and sinning against God. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, however, He provided an example of what it means to live in perfect righteousness. He defeated Satan in the wilderness where Adam failed, and on the cross, dying for our sin, He provided a way for us to be reconciled to God. Though we believers still struggle with temptation, we have the tools to resist sin through the power of the Holy Spirit and the wisdom of God’s Word.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 75). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Head** section in this week’s study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

 **HEAD:** Often when we are tempted, our access to God’s Word may be limited. Thus, it’s important that we seek to commit passages of Scripture to memory so that we are equipped to respond to Satan’s lies with truth from God’s Word.

How can we find passages of Scripture that will be helpful in our battle against temptation and sin?

 **HEART:** Ultimately, Satan tempted Jesus to doubt God’s provision and to take shortcuts to attain purely earthly desires, yet Jesus remained steadfast in the truth. We often fall for Satan’s temptation to doubt God’s goodness or to seek a shortcut. Therefore, we should look to Jesus, who resisted every temptation we struggle with, and pray for the Lord to help us to rely on His strength in our weakness.

Key Concept: Like Jesus, we can turn to Scripture to help us resist temptation.

Notes

How does Satan make us doubt God's goodness and faithfulness in our lives?



HANDS: Though we believers are free from the penalty and power of sin by God's grace in Christ, we still deal with temptation and sin in our lives. As obedient children of our heavenly Father, we are called to resist temptation and to flee from sin for His honor and glory.

What action steps will you take to avoid or resist temptation in your everyday life?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Read 1 Peter 5:8-9. Reflect on how you can resist temptation. Identify changes you need to make to be more alert and ready to battle temptation.
- Spend time in prayer asking God to reveal areas in which you are giving in to temptation. Develop a plan to guard yourself against temptation.
- Reach out to a friend and share about temptations you are experiencing. Ask the friend to pray with you about the temptation, and set up a regular time to check in with one another for accountability.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 75 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 141:1-5 with your group. Thank God for always being our refuge when we need rescue from temptation. Pray for His wisdom and strength in the battle against sin and for His faithful conviction when we fail.

References

1. C. H. Spurgeon, "A Private Enquiry," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 37 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1891), 29.

OF DEMONS AND THE DEVIL

Adapted from an article by Mark R. Dunn



“Face your demons,” says popular advice, but such salty wisdom severely disregards humanity’s pest-ridden history with demons and the devil. For millennia, people struggled to understand the diverse supernatural powers teeming at seemingly every juncture of human life. Despite religious cults that erected temples and shrines to numerous gods and goddesses, the ancients never found a satisfactory approach to deal with the relentless demons that mercilessly harassed people. Such was life until Jesus arrived. Now the demons implored him not to send them to their final destiny (Luke 8:31).

ANCIENT UNDERSTANDINGS

Long ago, dealing with demons was like handling lice, flies, or gnats: get rid of one and seemingly more arrive. Shrines and temples did not help. Ancient religion was useless against the frustrating, daily incursions from an ever-encroaching spirit world. To get relief, one was taught to honor countless traditions: do not stay overnight in a house of study; do not sit under a drain pipe; do not crush a louse on your garment; do not drink water at night.

Initially, ancient peoples understood demons to be intermediary spirits occupying the undefined realms between the gods and humanity. Some regarded demons as spirits of the dead that intervened in human affairs. Later, philosophers upgraded them to the sphere of the divine: lower than the gods but higher than men. In early usage, the Greek words *daimonion* and *diamon*, from which the English word *demon* derives, meant “divine being” and referred to the lower divines while *theos* referred to the higher divines. Many ancient people did not associate all the demonic with evil.

They thought some demons did good, while others brought evil upon humanity.

Mesopotamia, by far, struggled the most to understand the demonic. They clearly associated evil with demonic entities and believed demons won power over humans when people violated religious values and prohibitions. Mesopotamians eventually characterized violations as “sins,” actions that exposed people to demonic curses and possession.

Horrified, Mesopotamians viewed their world as becoming saturated by evil spirits that supposedly worked mischief among defenseless humans. They thought demons assumed animal forms and preferred uninhabited locations: deserts, mountains, ruins, and burial places. People even associated demons with air, believing these unseen entities could arrive on strange winds from faraway lands. Nevertheless demons turned up everywhere: in homes, foodstuffs, and water containers. People eventually blamed demons for all adversities, especially personal sickness and widespread disease. Mesopotamians named their demons, hoping magic could neutralize the mayhem these unseen beings created.

Elsewhere, Egyptians assigned natural phenomena like storms and floods to the gods but were terrified of the disembodied spirits of the dead who supposedly devised a range of evil deeds against humans. Rattled, Egyptians fumigated the inward spaces of their temples and homes to chase away lingering spirits.

Like the Egyptians, eventually all peoples realized that institutional religion had no effect on demonic activity. Expedient measures were needed. Thus, talismans, amulets, spells, incantations, and exorcisms became a common, essential part of life.

OLD TESTAMENT ERA

Remarkably, the Old Testament gives little attention to demonic activity. Twice it renders the Hebrew word *shedim* as “demons” (Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37). Otherwise people either assigned supernatural phenomena to God or described them in ways that did not convey demonism. Though evil phenomena went under-explained, the Israelites did not experience the terrible sense of being occupied by demons in the same way the Mesopotamians had interpreted their experiences.

The Old Testament does affirm, though, the presence of a being that is evil personified. This was the serpent that tempted Eve in the garden. This being, Satan, brought accusations against Job (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7); stood in front of the angel of the Lord to accuse Joshua the high priest (Zech. 3:1); and incited David to conduct a census (1 Chron. 21:1).

Throughout His ministry,
Jesus showed that
His authority is greater
than the sum of
all demonic power.

Having survived the horrendous experience of being forced from their homeland, being put into Babylonian captivity, and then living under post-exilic domination by foreigners caused the Jews to ponder the systems of evil. Many of their ideas concerning fallen angels and their leader, the prince of darkness, solidified during these

experiences and afterward. During the intertestamental period, most people believed that the world was full of supernatural agencies working for good or ill. Angels did good, and demons did evil. Satan, who had Old Testament cameo appearances, led the demons.

NEW TESTAMENT ERA

By the first century, both Jews and Gentiles had developed a greater understanding of demons. The New Testament thus depicts demons as being both powerful and pervasive. Demons appeared shortly after Jesus’s wilderness temptation (Matt. 4:24). The New Testament depicts demons tormenting humans and harassing the progress of God’s kingdom. They moved in swarms, lived among the dead, and invaded people’s lives. They caused disease and inflicted untold misery upon defenseless people.

Christ the Deliverer, though, arrived. To Him demons would powerlessly yield. Jesus talked about entering the strong man’s house, binding him, and plundering his property (Mark 3:27), a reference to His coming into the kingdom of the devil and delivering those in darkness. Thus, from Mary Magdalene, He cast out seven demons (Luke 8:2). Many times demons recognized Jesus; they knew He came to conquer them (Matt. 8:29; Mark 1:24). Additionally, He gave His disciples power to “trample on snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy” (Luke 10:19). Indeed throughout His ministry, Jesus showed that His authority is greater than the sum of all demonic power.

Since the first century, people have had a fascination with demons and the devil. Such interest, though, can be dangerous. Christians need not give their attention to the evil one. We can have assurance that Jesus still gives His followers victory over “the father of lies” (John 8:44) and the “cosmic powers of this darkness” (Eph. 6:12).

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JESUS CALLED FOLLOWERS

CORE PASSAGE: JOHN 1:35-37,40-51

CONTEXT

John's Gospel begins with a description of Jesus as the Logos, the eternal "Word" of God, a signifier of Jesus's divinity and a bold statement concerning the Son's co-existence with the Father prior to creation (vv. 1-5). John also summarized John the Baptist's ministry, who pointed to Jesus's messianic identity and mission. Jesus is the Word who became flesh (v. 14) and "the Lamb of God" who died to take away the sins of the world (vv. 29-34). Some of John's disciples took his words to heart and followed Jesus (vv. 35-51).

KEY CONCEPT

Following Jesus means acknowledging Him as Savior, God, and King.

As you examine John 1:35-37,40-51:

- Recognize that John acknowledged Jesus as the Lamb of God, and thus, his disciples followed Jesus.
- Contemplate the words of Nathanael's response when he witnessed Jesus's omniscience.



TIMELINE

John the Baptist Calls People to Repentance in Preparation for Jesus (Matthew 3:1-12)

Jesus Is Tempted in the Wilderness (Luke 4:1-13)

Jesus Performs His First Miracle at the Wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11)

John Baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13-17)

SESSION STUDY:
Jesus Calls Disciples to Follow Him (John 1:35-51)

Daily Readings

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: John 1:35-42 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: Matthew 4:12-22 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: John 1:43-51 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: Luke 5:1-11 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: Mark 1:14-20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 24 |



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

JESUS, THE LAMB OF GOD AND THE MESSIAH, IS WORTHY TO BE FOLLOWED (JOHN 1:35-37,40-44).

Circle each instance of the word “follow,” and underline the reason it was used.

35 The next day, John was standing with two of his disciples. **36** When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” **37** The two disciples heard him say this and followed Jesus. . . . **40** Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed him. **41** He first found his own brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated “the Christ”), **42** and he brought Simon to Jesus. When Jesus saw him, he said, “You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which is translated “Peter”). **43** The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. He found Philip and told him, “Follow me.” **44** Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter.

In his Gospel account, the apostle John wrote down Jesus’s teachings and miracles with the purpose of showing that Jesus is the Son of God (20:31). John recorded foundational truths concerning Jesus’s messianic identity and details of His divine mission, including the testimony of John the Baptist and descriptions of Jesus’s first followers.

Like other Gospel writers, John wrote about John the Baptist, Jesus’s forerunner who came preaching a message of repentance and proclaiming that the kingdom of heaven had come. Many heard John’s message and believed him, being baptized by him as a sign of their faith in God. But a few were called to experience the fruition of John’s message up close and personal.

Andrew, a follower of John the Baptist, heard John’s proclamation that Jesus is “the Lamb of God” (1:36), a title foretelling Jesus’s sacrifice for sin. Realizing that Jesus is the Messiah, Andrew shared this news with his brother, Simon, and brought him to Christ. Jesus then issued a name-change to Simon, marking the start of his new identity as one of Jesus’s closest disciples.

LEADER NOTE: The revelation of Jesus’s identity as the Messiah was not simply a fact to consider but an invitation for those who believed to follow Him. When we begin to follow Jesus, we become His disciples, a word meaning a student or follower who adheres to the teaching of another. John 1:35-44 details how Jesus’s first followers—Andrew, Simon (Peter), and Philip—came to realize His true identity and how they responded in faith.

How does the title “the Lamb of God” point to Jesus’s purpose?

Key Concept: Following Jesus means acknowledging Him as Savior, God, and King.

Notes

The message of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection demands a response. We either receive the message and embrace it in faith or we reject it and suffer the consequences for that rejection. The key word in this passage is “follow,” which is the proper response to hearing and receiving the good news of Jesus’s sinless life, death on the cross, and resurrection to take away sin. And the proclamation of this gospel constitutes a call upon all those who hear it to repent of sin, to believe in Jesus, and to follow Him with their whole heart.

LEADER NOTE: Before leaving the area for Galilee, Jesus found Philip and invited him to “follow me” (v. 43). Philip accepted the invitation and became a disciple of Jesus. Andrew followed Jesus because he was pointed to Jesus by John the Baptist. Simon followed Jesus because his brother, Andrew, took him to meet Jesus. Philip followed because Jesus called him firsthand. Whichever way we are called and come to faith in Jesus, the Lamb of God and the Messiah, He is worthy to be followed.

What are some ways you are following Jesus, the Lamb of God who has called you through the proclamation of His gospel?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

CALLING: The calling of God to salvation happens in two ways: externally through the proclamation of the gospel and internally through the Holy Spirit working in the heart of the person who hears. Both of these callings are essential, and both work together to bring someone to faith in Christ (2 Tim. 1:8-10).

JESUS, THE SON OF GOD AND THE KING OF ISRAEL, WILL REVEAL MANY THINGS TO HIS PEOPLE (JOHN 1:45-51).

Underline words or phrases that relate to the change Nathanael experienced concerning his belief about Jesus's identity.

45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth." **46** "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael asked him. "Come and see," Philip answered. **47** Then Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said about him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." **48** "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you," Jesus answered. **49** "Rabbi," Nathanael replied, "You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!" **50** Jesus responded to him, "Do you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this." **51** Then he said, "Truly I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

"Come and see" (v. 46). These three words sum up the invitation to experience the newness of life found in embracing the good news of Jesus as the Messiah.

The end of John 1 details the events surrounding the call of Jesus to His first disciples. We saw the good news about Jesus spread via word of mouth as the news traveled from John the Baptist to Andrew to Peter. Then Jesus Himself called Philip, and this new follower relayed the message to Nathanael, who initially responded with skepticism, maybe even disdain. Whether the gospel we share is welcomed, questioned, or rejected, it is crucial that followers of Jesus continue sharing the message about the Savior who came to set people free from their sins.

LEADER NOTE: Nathanael's first response to Philip's news was one of skepticism. Nathanael was from Cana (21:2), a small town near the small town of Nazareth. Nathanael's comment may have referenced some local rivalry. It also could be that Nathanael was expecting the promised Messiah to come from Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2), so identifying Jesus as being from Nazareth obscured that heritage and prophetic fulfillment (see John 7:40-43,52).

How can we help others "come and see" Jesus for who He is and what He has done to save sinners?

Key Concept: Following Jesus means acknowledging Him as Savior, God, and King.

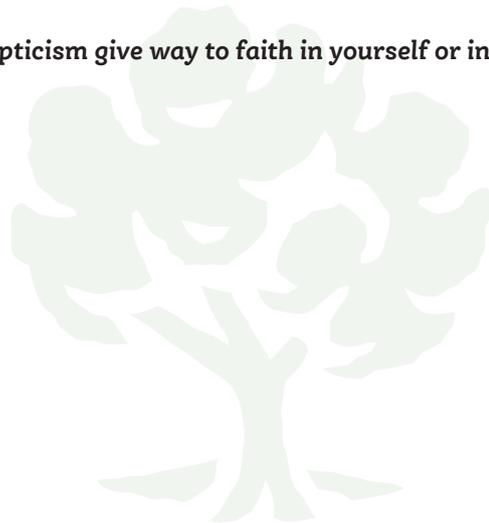
Notes

This interaction between Philip and his friend Nathanael revealed further reasons to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Prior to their gospel conversation, Jesus had already taken note of Nathanael, having observed him underneath the shade of a fig tree. Jesus’s claim pointed to His divine omniscience as He paid attention even to one who would be skeptical of His identity. This revelation prompted Nathanael’s confession: “You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!” (1:49).

Nathanael was amazed at Jesus’s power and authority, yet Jesus told him that “greater things” were in store (v. 50). Alluding to the Old Testament account of Jacob’s vision of a stairway between heaven and earth (see Gen. 28), Jesus told Nathanael that he would see “angels” ascend and descend upon Him, the Son of Man (John 1:51). Jesus boldly declared Himself to be the connection between heaven and earth, and no one comes to the Father except through Him (14:6).

LEADER NOTE: Jesus wasn’t upset by Nathanael’s skepticism. Instead, He recognized Nathanael as an authentic seeker. Jesus said Nathanael was an Israelite without deceit, and then He alluded to Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, who used deceit to receive his father’s blessing. While Jacob fled the consequences of his deceit, he witnessed the miraculous and heard the voice of God renew His promises to Abraham and Isaac with Jacob (Gen. 28:13-15). Yet everything Jacob experienced would be nothing compared to what Nathanael and the rest of the disciples experienced as they followed Jesus.

How have you seen skepticism give way to faith in yourself or in others?



CHURCH CONNECTION

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He is also the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of Israel. He calls people to follow Him, and believers, likewise, should call on others to come and see Jesus.

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: As the group arrives, invite them to share about a famous person they follow on social media or the news. Ask: “What draws you to follow that person? How does our culture use the term ‘follow’ in different ways?”

CONTEXT

SAY: In first-century Jewish culture, to follow someone meant that you literally went where they went. Particularly, to follow a rabbi indicated that you put yourself under the submission of the rabbi’s teaching. You went where he went and you did what he did or said to do. On account of his preparatory ministry, John the Baptist had some disciples of his own. No doubt they had been baptized as a sign of their repentance and their expectation for the coming of God’s kingdom on earth. But John made it clear that his ministry was to point to someone else—ultimately, his disciples were created to follow the Messiah.

RECAP

ASK: What stood out to you in your personal preparation this week as you learned about John’s disciples coming to Jesus? What role did word of mouth play in Jesus gaining more followers?

SAY: Remember that John did not begrudge his disciples for leaving him to follow Jesus. Instead, he had a heart of humility, recognizing Jesus for who He is. John knew his purpose was to point people to the Messiah, and he wanted his followers to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God and to follow Him. This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

TRANSITION: From here, let’s consider how Jesus was identified by John the Baptist and the disciples to strengthen our own discipleship and to inform our evangelism in calling others to follow Jesus.



Listen to session-by-session training every week on

Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify

ministrygrid.com/gospelproject · gospelproject.com/leader-training.

Key Concept: Following Jesus means acknowledging Him as Savior, God, and King.

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

LIST: Direct the group to page 82 in the Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a listing activity titled “Choosing to Follow.” Display the list on a board and record the group’s findings as they work through the Scripture text.

Choosing to Follow

Read the passages below. Write down what compelled the disciples to follow Jesus. Then record what convinced you that Jesus is the Messiah.

ANDREW (John 1:35-37,40-41)

SIMON PETER (John 1:41-42)

PHILIP (John 1:43-45)

NATHANAEL (John 1:45-49)

YOURSELF

READ: Invite a volunteer to read John 1:35-37.

DISCUSS: Lead the group to discuss why the two disciples left John the Baptist to follow Jesus. Ask: “Why was trust in John necessary for these two disciples to go and follow Jesus? What develops that level of trust?”

READ: Invite a volunteer to read John 1:40-51.

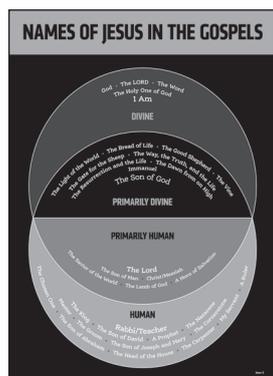
COMPARE: Lead the group to identify the way each disciple came to follow Christ, recording these on the board and in the PSG. Then challenge them to point out similarities and differences between the disciples’ experiences. *(Andrew listened to John, Simon Peter listened to Andrew, and Nathanael listened to Philip. / John called Jesus the Lamb of God, Andrew called Jesus the Messiah, Philip called Jesus the promised Prophet and King. / Andrew brought Simon to Jesus, Philip brought Nathanael to Jesus. / Jesus Himself called Philip / Nathanael was skeptical. / Jesus demonstrated divine authority with Simon and Nathanael.)*

Notes

DISCUSS: For our mission of making disciples, what can we learn from the patterns and distinctions we see in this list from our passage? *(We should try to bring our family and friends to Jesus; we need to tell others about Jesus: who He is and what He has done for us; skepticism is not a dead end; while people may come to faith directly through encountering Jesus in Scripture, more often the connection to Jesus in His Word will come through a faithful witness.)*

REFLECT: Instruct group members to take a couple of moments and record in their PSG how they came to follow Jesus by faith. Invite any volunteers to briefly share their calling to follow Jesus.

ENGAGE: Invite a volunteer to read verse 49 again. *(Recall Pack Items 3 and 4: Names of Jesus in the Gospels [poster and handout].)* Say: “Jesus had already been described as the Lamb of God, the Messiah, and the promised Prophet and King. Then Nathanael added three titles in his confession: Rabbi, the Son of God, and the King of Israel.” Ask: “How does knowing who Christ is make a difference in our willingness to follow Him and to tell others about Him?”



DEBRIEF

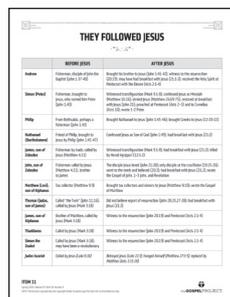
Based on this passage, what does it mean to follow Jesus?

How has this passage encouraged you to grow in your mission of making disciples?



SUMMARIZE

Pass out copies of **Pack Item 11: They Followed Jesus** and briefly review the lives of the disciples and their calling. Say: “Following Jesus means acknowledging Him as Lord and Savior. In Jesus’s interactions with the disciples, He revealed the pattern for discipleship: Jesus invited people to follow Him and learn from Him, and then they invited others to follow Him. Discipleship includes being a disciple and then making disciples.”



HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 83). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week’s study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: Following Jesus does not only involve our intellect, but knowing what we believe is a major part of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. John the Baptist had primed Andrew and others so that when he identified Jesus as the Messiah, they were ready to believe.

How can we know more about Jesus and His Word to help our own discipleship and evangelism?

Key Concept: Following Jesus means acknowledging Him as Savior, God, and King.

Notes



HEART: Nathanael responded to Philip's invitation to "come and see"

Jesus with skepticism, questions, and doubts, which Jesus addressed without shaming Nathanael. Jesus is able to hear our questions and handle our doubts.

What questions regarding your faith do you need to pray about and seek faithful counsel?



HANDS: Jesus's first disciples came to Him as they were called, and most

of them experienced that call through the invitation of a family member or friend. As believers in Christ, as His followers, we have a responsibility and a privilege to share the good news of Jesus with others. We have come to Him as our Messiah-King, our Savior from our sins, and we should want the whole world to experience the peace and joy of following Jesus themselves.

Who will you invite to "come and see" Jesus as the Messiah and Savior who is worthy of our faith and following?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Read John 1:1-18 and outline what you learn about the identity of Jesus in this passage. Reflect on how knowing who Christ is makes a difference in how you follow Him and share about Him with others.
- Read Romans 10:9-17 and consider how you can tell someone the good news of the gospel this week.
- Pray for opportunities to bring others to Jesus this week. Consider who you can invite to come to Jesus with you.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 83 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 24:3-6 with your group. Praise God for sending Jesus to be our blessing, our righteousness, and our salvation. Thank the Lord that we can follow Jesus in faith and enter into God's holy presence.

THE GOSPEL PROJECT

UNIT 21

THE MINISTRY



JOHN



MEMORY VERSES

“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness,
so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that
everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.
For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one
and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him
will not perish but have eternal life.”

—John 3:14-16



WATER TO WINE

CORE PASSAGE: JOHN 2:1-11

CONTEXT

The prologue to John's Gospel declared Jesus to be God (1:1), the One through whom all things were created (1:3), and the revelation of the Father's glory (1:14). Then John recounted John the Baptist's witness (1:19-34) and Jesus's calling of His first disciples (1:35-51). Turning water into wine was Jesus's first miraculous sign recounted in John's Gospel. The site of this first miracle, Cana, was a town in the region of Galilee near Jesus's hometown of Nazareth. This episode marked the beginning of Jesus's public ministry.

KEY CONCEPT

Jesus's power over creation reveals His divine glory and our only hope for salvation.

As you examine John 2:1-11:

- Contemplate that while the Father's will was Jesus's first priority, He also met the needs of others.
- Recognize that this miracle revealed Jesus's glory and further convinced His disciples to believe in Him.



TIMELINE

John Baptizes Jesus
in the Jordan River
(Matthew 3:13-17)

Jesus Calls Disciples to Follow Him
(John 1:35-51)

Jesus Cleanses the Temple
(John 2:13-22)

Jesus Is Tempted in the Wilderness
(Luke 4:1-13)

SESSION STUDY:
Jesus Performs His First Miracle at
the Wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11)

Nicodemus Visits Jesus
at Night (John 3:1-21)

Daily Readings

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: John 2:1-2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: John 2:9-10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: John 2:3-5 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: John 2:11-12 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: John 2:6-8 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 104 |



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

JESUS, BEING THE SAVIOR, CAME ULTIMATELY TO LAY HIS LIFE DOWN FOR OUR SINS (JOHN 2:1-5).

Circle the words that reveal Jesus’s ultimate focus in His life and ministry.

1 On the third day a wedding took place in Cana of Galilee. Jesus’s mother was there, **2** and Jesus and his disciples were invited to the wedding as well. **3** When the wine ran out, Jesus’s mother told him, “They don’t have any wine.” **4** “What has this concern of yours to do with me, woman?” Jesus asked. “My hour has not yet come.” **5** “Do whatever he tells you,” his mother told the servants.

While Jesus’s ultimate focus was on doing the Father’s will for our salvation, He also cared about the needs of His family and friends. That was evident when He attended a wedding in Cana along with His disciples. Jesus’s mother, Mary, also was invited to the wedding. John did not specifically name Mary; perhaps readers already were familiar with her or perhaps John wanted to avoid confusing her with other Marys in his Gospel.

The opportunity for Jesus to help His friends and family arose when the wine ran out at the wedding. A first-century Jewish wedding celebration could last up to a week, and the groom was financially responsible for the event. Running out of wine was an embarrassment at best. At worst, it might have left the groom open to a lawsuit from the bride’s family in a culture focused on honor and shame.¹ These realities provoked Mary to approach Jesus for help. They also seem to have played a role in eliciting Jesus’s response of compassion.

LEADER NOTE: The presence of wine at Jesus’s first miracle should not be viewed as a categorical license for the consumption of alcohol today. Scripture includes many warnings against drunkenness and encouragements for the wisdom of soberness (Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35; Eph. 5:18). The wine in John 2 certainly was fermented, yet wine in the ancient world, unlike modern wine, typically was diluted to between one-third and one-tenth its original strength.²

Why might we struggle to believe Jesus cares about our everyday lives?

Jesus’s response to His mother might sound harsh, but it was not. He addressed her as “woman” again on the cross when He assigned John to care for her after His departure (19:26). Still, “woman” was a less endearing term than generally expected between a mother and son. That address, along with Jesus’s question, served as a gentle reminder that He came not to do favors for people in a pinch but to complete a mission in obedience to His Father.

Key Concept: Jesus's power over creation reveals His divine glory and our only hope for salvation.

“My hour” in the Gospel of John refers to the time of Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross (7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; 17:1). Jesus’s statement to Mary about His “hour” underscored that His entire ministry aimed toward the cross and resurrection. Remedying the lack of wine would meet a temporal need, but more than that, Jesus was beginning to reveal the glory that would be seen most fully in His death and resurrection. Mary responded in faith by telling the servants to do whatever He instructed.

LEADER NOTE: Mary’s two courses of action yielded very different responses from Jesus. Her statement “They don’t have any wine” (2:3) was the plea of a mother to her obedient son. His rebuke, however, reminds us that no one has an inside track to receive or distribute His blessings. Mary’s subsequent instructions to the servants reflected faith in Jesus as the Lord. That response yielded His help and a display of His glory. Mary, like every other sinful human, had to approach Jesus by faith.

How does Jesus’s care for our temporal needs remind us of His ultimate provision for our spiritual needs on the cross?



GOSPEL CONNECTION

Jesus is the Creator God and can perform miracles to reveal His glory. His greatest miracle is seen in His resurrection, conquering death and sin for our salvation.

Notes

JESUS, BEING GOD, IS ALL-POWERFUL AND CAN PERFORM MIRACLES (JOHN 2:6-11).

Circle details in these verses that highlight Jesus's power.

6 Now six stone water jars had been set there for Jewish purification. Each contained twenty or thirty gallons. **7** “Fill the jars with water,” Jesus told them. So they filled them to the brim. **8** Then he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the headwaiter.” And they did. **9** When the headwaiter tasted the water (after it had become wine), he did not know where it came from—though the servants who had drawn the water knew. He called the groom **10** and told him, “Everyone sets out the fine wine first, then, after people are drunk, the inferior. But you have kept the fine wine until now.” **11** Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

The six stone water jars were used for ceremonial washings, likely of hands or utensils. Each was approximately the size of a 20-gallon trashcan, and cumulatively they held between 120 and 150 gallons of liquid. Filling them “to the brim” (v. 7) would provide more than enough water to fulfill the required Jewish rituals. Yet performance of the Jewish rituals would not remedy the problem at hand. They needed Jesus to do something new, and that is precisely what He did.

LEADER NOTE: The six stone jars were there for purification, but they also represented the old system of Jewish washings, sacrifices, and ceremonies. Jesus's miracle not only helped the need at hand but it also pointed to His ability to change things and make things new and better. This includes fulfilling the old law and establishing a new covenant. It also includes making us white as snow from our sin-stained lives. Jesus has the power to transform anything for His purposes and mission.

At some point between drawing the water from the jars and giving it to the headwaiter, the water became wine. The headwaiter was unaware anything supernatural had occurred, but the servants knew. The Son of God did what first-century Jewish religion and rituals could never do. He manifested the power of God on earth, utilizing it to care for the Lord's people and to show His glory.

Why is it sometimes hard to believe Jesus can do the supernatural?

Key Concept: Jesus's power over creation reveals His divine glory and our only hope for salvation.

Through His miracle, Jesus revealed His glory. In verses 9-10, John's emphasis shifted to the quality of the wine. As an expert on banquets and feasts, the headwaiter was the most qualified person to evaluate the quality of the wine Jesus produced, and he deemed it superior. That fact highlighted Jesus's creative power, manifesting His glory.

Remarkably, not everyone who witnessed the miracle believed in Jesus as the Son of God. When He revealed His glory, "his disciples believed in Jesus" (v. 11). This introduces an idea that John developed as his Gospel progressed: those who believed God's Word and followed Jesus had their faith bolstered by supernatural signs. Those who demanded signs as a condition of belief, however, remained unconvinced by miracles (see John 5; 6). The deeper realities of life and salvation are perceived by those with eyes of faith.

LEADER NOTE: The Old Testament prophesied that when abundant wine flowed among God's people, the kingdom of God was at hand. Isaiah prophesied that "the LORD of Armies will prepare . . . a feast with aged wine, . . . fine vintage wine" (Isa. 25:6). Amos prophesied a messianic era when "the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and all the hills will flow with it" (Amos 9:13). The abundant fine wine at Cana signaled the Messiah had arrived in Jesus.

When have you witnessed God's supernatural work, and how did you respond?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

MIRACLES: A miracle is an event in which God makes an exception to the natural order or supersedes natural laws for the purpose of demonstrating His glory and/or validating His message. Miracles are recorded throughout Scripture; signs and wonders were often evident when a prophet or an apostle was speaking God's message to the people. Because we believe God to be all-powerful and personally involved in this world, we believe He can and does perform miracles.

Notes



ARRIVAL

SURVEY: Poll the group for their response to this question: “Which of these incidents would you characterize as a miracle, and why: (1) when trying to make it in time for a family funeral, you secure a seat after being on standby for the last flight available; (2) you win a highly significant award for a proposal despite stiff competition from other, more expert entrants; and (3) a friend with a terminal diagnosis shows signs of being healed?”

CONTEXT

TRANSITION: The Bible is filled with examples of what we consider to be miracles, largely because there is simply no other explanation for them. These incidents are exceptions to the natural order or they supersede natural laws as a demonstration of the power of God. From Adam’s first breath to a bush burning in the wilderness or the parting of the Red Sea, these events in Scripture testify to the glory of God, manifested in acts accomplished only through divine power. Some of the prophets in the Old Testament were able to perform miracles to affirm their message; this was true of Jesus as well. *(Display Pack Item 12: Christ as Prophet and compare how Jesus wasn’t just a prophet but the Prophet.)*

SAY: It is logical to assume Jesus would glorify God by performing miracles of His own, but an honest observation and analysis of those miracles defies reasoning. Miracles evoke awe and wonder. They may lead us to question, but they require an element of reverence to be accepted and respected. Jesus’s first miracle helps us understand the earmarks of a miracle. In breaking them down, we will be astonished anew.

RECAP

RECORD: Invite the group to share aloud some of the key points from the study passage that they found particularly intriguing or perplexing. Write them on a board to help keep them in mind during the group activity.

TRANSITION: While miracles may defy science, it is true that there are certain common elements that appear to be present if God gets the glory. Let’s get to the essence of the making of a miracle.



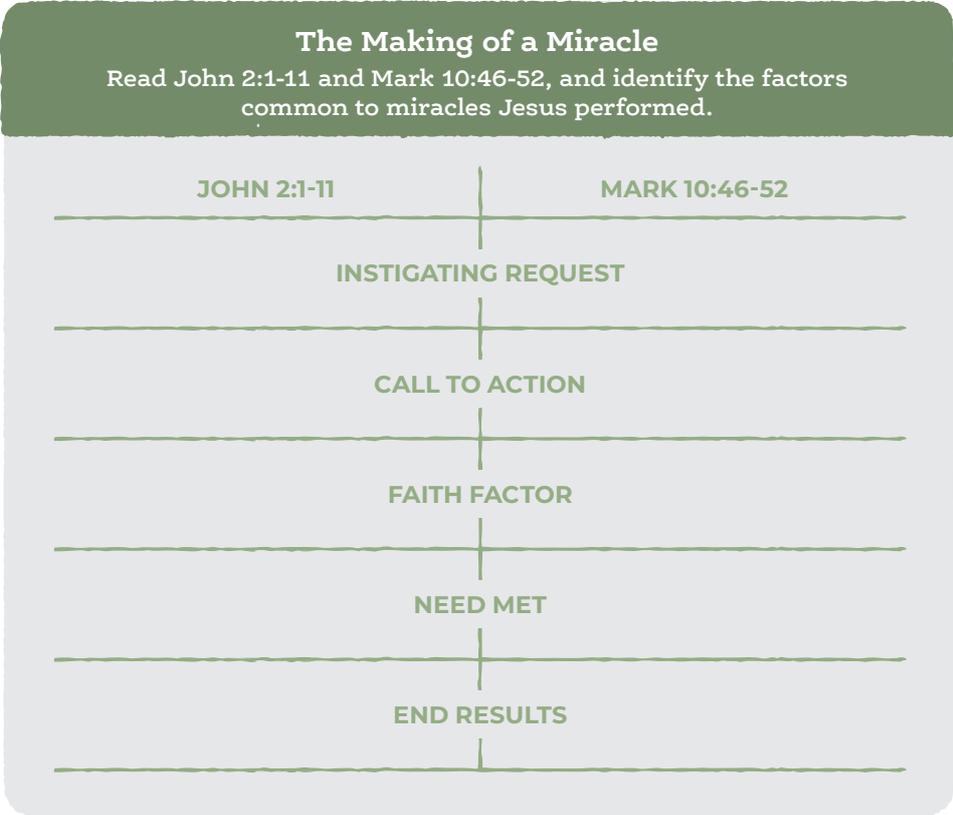
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Key Concept: Jesus's power over creation reveals His divine glory and our only hope for salvation.

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

COMPARE: Draw attention to “The Making of a Miracle” chart in the Personal Study Guide (PSG) on page 92, and explain that this exercise will compare the water-to-wine miracle to the healing of a blind man recorded in Mark 10:46-52. The goal will be to discover the common components of both miracles.



ASSIGN: Form two groups and assign one group the miracle of the water turning to wine in John 2. Assign to the second group the healing of a blind man in Mark 10. Invite the groups to read their Bible passages and work together to determine the instigation (John 2:3; Mark 10:47-48,51); the call to action (John 2:7-8; Mark 10:49-51); the faith factor (John 2:5,8; Mark 10:48,51); the needs met (John 2:9-10; Mark 10:52); and the end results (John 2:11; Mark 10:52). After a few minutes for discussion, bring the groups back together.

READ: Call for a volunteer from the first group to read aloud John 2:1-11.

REPORT: Instruct this group to report their findings and record them in their PSG while you write them on the board.

READ: Call for a volunteer from the other group to read aloud Mark 10:46-52.

REPORT: Instruct this group to report their findings and record them in their PSG while you write them on the board.

DISCUSS: In the water-to-wine miracle, if Jesus pointed out that His hour had not yet come but He then yielded to His mother to accomplish what she asked, what may have been His purpose? (*Suggest: The miracle itself was not the end result because the purpose of miracles is to glorify God and to draw human beings to Christ, our only hope of salvation.*)

PROBE: Thinking about this and some of the other miracles of the Bible, is faith a requirement for a miracle to be accomplished or its byproduct? Why? What is the place of obedience in a miracle?

DEBRIEF

What do these miracles tell us of Jesus's response to our earthly needs?

How do these miracles point to Jesus as the solution for our greatest need?

SUMMARIZE

Jesus used miracles to manifest the glory of God and to identify Himself as the Christ. His first miracle of turning water into wine resulted in converts then, and the ultimate miracle of His resurrection has resulted in salvations throughout the ages. Jesus has not retired from miracle making because He remains personally involved in this world and continues to engage humanity with His divine power, transforming and saving sinners through faith in Him.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 93). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: Sometimes we witness the power of Jesus on display but fail to recognize it as Jesus's work. We see Jesus bring a friend through a health challenge. We hear of a financial need in our church being met. We learn of a broken relationship that has been restored. As the disciples did at Cana, it is important to acknowledge such events as the work of Jesus.

What might it look like to believe and acknowledge Jesus's work in our lives?



HEART: When Mary had a need, she brought it to Jesus. Then she trusted Him to address it in His timing and in a way that would support the salvation He came to accomplish. Needs in our lives are occasions to trust Jesus as well. Bring them to Him in prayer, trusting Him to address those needs in a way that best advances His mission to redeem humanity.

What are some reasons you might resist taking your concerns to Jesus in prayer?

Key Concept: Jesus's power over creation reveals His divine glory and our only hope for salvation.



HANDS: There are people in your life who may be experiencing deep needs. They could use reminders that while Jesus's ultimate focus was doing the Father's will for our salvation, He also cared for the difficulties of His people. Consider how a call, text, or card might encourage them and drive them to deeper trust in the Lord.

Who in need will you contact with encouragement this week?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Conduct a self-assessment about the status of your faith in God's power to work miracles and your obedience to His ongoing work in your life.
- Identify a miracle you would like to see in your own life and pray for it to be accomplished according to the Lord's will.
- Make a list of people who need a saving miracle in their lives and pray for their salvation.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 93 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 104:31-35 with your group, praising God for His works. Invite your group to take turns thanking God for the mighty works He has done.

References

1. John F. MacArthur Jr., *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), Jn 2:1.
2. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; InterVarsity Press 1991), 169.

Notes



THE REAL MARY

By David Roach



Misconceptions about Mary abound. She was not a feminist icon, a sinless miracle worker, a critic of traditional authority structures, or a reflection of the human need for feminine symbols of the divine. Amid our efforts to correct these misconceptions, we may focus so heavily on stating what Mary was not that we fail to state positively what she was. Scripture says more about Mary, the mother of Jesus, than we often realize. Her life teaches us lessons about family, faith, and godliness.

MARY'S LIFE

Mary was a young woman living in the Galilean village of Nazareth in the first century. A relative of John the Baptist's mother, Elizabeth, Mary was engaged to a carpenter named Joseph. Though she was a virgin, the angel Gabriel appeared to her and said, "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus" (Luke 1:31). Despite his own trepidations about the virgin conception, Joseph married her and refrained from normal marital relations until after Jesus was born (Matt. 1:25). Mary gave birth to Jesus in Bethlehem, some ninety miles south of Nazareth, when Mary and Joseph traveled there to be counted in a census. After presenting Jesus at the temple some forty days following His birth (Luke 2:22-24), Mary and Joseph apparently resided in Bethlehem for a time and later fled to Egypt under threat from the murderous King Herod (Matt. 2:13-15). They returned to Nazareth after hearing from an angel that Herod had died (vv. 19-23).

Mary appears in the Gospels with less frequency following the narratives of Jesus's birth and infancy. Mary and Joseph had other children following Jesus's birth (Matt. 13:54-56; Mark 6:3).

She worried when twelve-year-old Jesus remained in Jerusalem, unbeknownst to His parents, on a trip there for Passover (Luke 2:41-50). She attended the wedding in Cana, where Jesus performed His first miracle (John 2:1-11). She was present at the crucifixion, where Jesus assigned the apostle John to take care of her (19:25-27). She even gathered with the early believers in Acts 1:14.

Though Mary's biographical information is confined to the Gospels and Acts, other Scriptures reference her. Genesis 3:15 predicted the offspring of a woman one day would defeat the devil and sin's curse. Isaiah referenced Mary in his prophecy that "the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). Paul acknowledged Mary in stating that Jesus was "born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). Clearly Mary's life is more than a historical footnote in Scripture. But does she have enduring significance for our lives today? In a word, yes.

Mary pointed us toward
Jesus by the life she
lived and the lessons
she exemplified.

Mary's life is more than a historical footnote in Scripture.
But does she have enduring significance for our lives today?
In a word, yes.

MARY'S LESSONS

Mary dignified motherhood. In our modern culture that often views children as obstacles to success rather than blessings to be nurtured, Mary reminds us that God values motherhood. After all, He chose a human mother to birth, nurture, and teach His own Son.

Mary modeled faith. When Gabriel announced God's miraculous plan to Mary, she first believed then sought to understand. Though she could not comprehend how a virgin conception would occur, she told the angel: "I am the Lord's servant. May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Her attitude of faith seeking understanding persisted. When shepherds visited baby Jesus and shared an angelic message, "Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them" (2:19). Likewise, she "kept all these things in her heart" following the episode in Jerusalem when her young Son reminded her God was His Father (v. 51). Mary's attitude contrasted with Zechariah's, who demanded answers from Gabriel before he would believe God's word (1:18).

Mary exemplified growth in godliness. Mary walked a difficult road. When she presented baby Jesus at the temple, the prophet Simeon told her, "A sword will pierce your own soul" (2:35)—likely foreshadowing Jesus's crucifixion and the pain Mary would experience as a witness. Along life's difficult road, Mary grew in personal holiness. She was not sinless. At times she exhibited spiritual immaturity. Presumably, she was among the family members who responded to Jesus's early public ministry by claiming, "He's out of his mind" (Mark 3:21). At the wedding in Cana, Mary prodded Jesus to do His mother a favor and remedy the lack

of wine. Jesus responded with a gentle rebuke, reminding her that no one, not even her, had an inside track to win His favor (John 2:3-4). That reality alone corrects the misconception that humans can go to Mary in prayer for an inside track to God. When she responded to the correction in humble faith, she experienced Jesus's power (vv. 5-11).

Of course, the goal of any study of Mary is not merely to know Jesus's mother but to know Jesus Himself. Yet Mary pointed us toward Jesus by the life she lived and the lessons she exemplified. She spoke with Spirit-inspired foresight when she said two thousand years ago, "All generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48).

David Roach is pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church in Saraland, Alabama. He and his wife, Erin, have three children.

WORSHIP TO ZEAL

CORE PASSAGE: JOHN 2:13-22

CONTEXT

Jesus performed many more miracles than were recorded in the Gospels (John 20:30-31), though Jesus's earthly ministry was more than a series of miraculous signs. Jesus demonstrated He is the Son of God in other ways too, including His driving out the vendors from the temple. John recorded an earlier temple cleansing than the one recorded by the other Gospel writers that took place during the week prior to His crucifixion. In this earlier incident, everyone who witnessed the event recognized that Jesus asserted authority like no other teacher of the law.

KEY CONCEPT

Jesus has the authority to purify all things because it all belongs to Him.

As you examine John 2:13-22:

- Recognize that the temple, where God dwelled with His people, had become a place of business and greed as opposed to a place of worship.
- Dwell on the fact that Jesus pointed to His future death and resurrection as a sign of His authority for His actions.



TIMELINE

John Baptizes Jesus
in the Jordan River
(Matthew 3:13-17)

Jesus Calls Disciples to Follow Him
(John 1:35-51)

SESSION STUDY:
Jesus Cleanses the Temple
(John 2:13-22)

Jesus Is Tempted in the Wilderness
(Luke 4:1-13)

Jesus Performs His First Miracle at
the Wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11)

Nicodemus Visits Jesus
at Night (John 3:1-21)

Daily Readings

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: John 2:13-15 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: John 2:21-22 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: John 2:16-17 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: John 2:23-25 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: John 2:18-21 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 69 |



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this session's Scripture passages.

Notes



SCAN ME

Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to learn more about Christ's zeal for the Lord's house and how it pointed to His messiahship.

JESUS IS ZEALOUS ABOUT HOLINESS AND PURITY (JOHN 2:13-17).

Underline the words describing actions Jesus took in the temple.

13 The Jewish Passover was near, and so Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **14** In the temple he found people selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and he also found the money changers sitting there. **15** After making a whip out of cords, he drove everyone out of the temple with their sheep and oxen. He also poured out the money changers' coins and overturned the tables. **16** He told those who were selling doves, "Get these things out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!" **17** And his disciples remembered that it is written: Zeal for your house will consume me.

When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, He found two types of businesses occurring in the temple—almost certainly in the outer court known as the Court of the Gentiles. First, people were selling animals used for sacrifices in worship. Worshipers at the temple were required to bring a sacrifice to the temple three times a year. For worshipers traveling a long distance, purchasing animals at the temple was more convenient to ensure the animals wouldn't get sick or injured along the way.

The second type of business being conducted was money changing. Worshipers came from various regions in the Greco-Roman world, and they needed to pay the temple tax with the appropriate currency. John did not provide any evidence that the business practices occurring were inherently corrupt. Yet Jesus's anger was provoked because the temple, a place of worship, had become a place of business and greed.

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

"Christian churches and chapels, no doubt, are very unlike the Jewish temple. . . . But they are places where God's word is read, and where Christ is specially present. The man who professes to worship in them should surely behave with reverence and respect. The man who brings his worldly matters with him when he professes to worship, is doing that which is evidently most offensive to Christ."¹

—J. C. Ryle (1816–1900)

Key Concept: Jesus has the authority to purify all things because it all belongs to Him.

LEADER NOTE: God demands reverence in worship. To that end, the Lord's people must worship Him in His prescribed way with hearts committed to Him. Aaron's sons burned incense as they wanted rather than as God commanded, so they were consumed by fire (Lev. 10:1-2). Corinthian believers used the Lord's Supper selfishly to satisfy their own appetites, and some of them died as a result (1 Cor. 11:21,30). Jesus's condemnation of the vendors in the temple was consistent with the Bible's teaching on true worship.

What practices help you worship God in a reverent manner?

Making a whip out of cords, Jesus drove the people and animals out of the temple complex. This was no sinful fit of rage—it was righteous indignation that a place intended for the solemn dignity of worship had become focused on commercial gain. These events caused Jesus's disciples to recall Psalm 69:9, in which David wrote, "Zeal for your house has consumed me," which foreshadowed the zeal of Jesus for His Father's worship.

Jesus's foes did not understand His profound zeal to worship the Father. His zeal led Him to call for reform. The word "consume" took on double meaning in John 2:17. Not only did zeal consume Jesus's soul, but Jesus's enemies eventually consumed His life on the cross because they hated His zeal. Part of their testimony against Him related to this episode, though false witnesses distorted His words (see Matt. 26:61; Mark 14:58).

LEADER NOTE: Matthew, Mark, and Luke recounted a temple cleansing by Jesus during the final week before Jesus's crucifixion (Matt. 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-46). John may have recorded the one temple cleansing out of chronological order for thematic purposes. But possibly Jesus cleansed the temple twice: once at the beginning of His public ministry, as seen in John, and once at the end, as seen in the other Gospels.

How has Jesus's zeal for worshipers from all nations caused you to adjust your life?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

In purifying the temple, Jesus revealed His authority as well as pointed to His future death and resurrection.

Notes

JESUS'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION WOULD PROVE HIS AUTHORITY (JOHN 2:18-22).

Underline all the statements made and questions asked about the temple in these verses.

18 So the Jews replied to him, "What sign will you show us for doing these things?" **19** Jesus answered, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days." **20** Therefore the Jews said, "This temple took forty-six years to build, and will you raise it up in three days?" **21** But he was speaking about the temple of his body. **22** So when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the statement Jesus had made.

The Jews questioned Jesus's authority to call for righteousness. When John referenced "the Jews" here, he was not identifying Jewish people in general. The label signified Jewish leaders, probably the temple authorities or the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. While Jesus wanted people to ask Him questions, their questioning was wrong on at least two levels. First, they seemed unconcerned with whether Jesus's cleansing of the temple was just. They were more concerned that someone might usurp their authority.

Second, they wanted a miracle-on-demand to prove Jesus possessed authority. Time and again in the Gospels, Jesus rebuffed those who demanded supernatural works before they would believe (see Matt. 12:39; 16:4; John 4:48). Ample evidence for faith in Christ was readily available, including His miracles. That evidence is available to us too. We must trust Jesus based on the evidence provided in His Word.

LEADER NOTE: The Jewish leaders had it all wrong when they thought Jesus should satisfy their demand for a miracle. Placing faith in Jesus as Lord generally precedes receiving greater understanding of Jesus. As Paul put it, "Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ" (Rom. 10:17). We hear His Word, then believe, then understand with greater depth. Conversely, when people placed shallow faith in Jesus merely because of His miracles, He did not admit them to His circle of disciples (John 2:24).

What has helped you surrender to Jesus's authority in your life?

Key Concept: Jesus has the authority to purify all things because it all belongs to Him.

Notes

The greatest sign of Jesus's authority was yet to come: His death and resurrection. However, the Jewish leaders misunderstood what Jesus said. They thought His reference to "this temple" meant the temple building in Jerusalem, which King Herod the Great had begun renovating forty-six years earlier (vv. 19-20). But Jesus meant "the temple of his body" (v. 21).

Under the old covenant, God manifested His presence to His people in the temple. Jesus inaugurated a new covenant as He was Immanuel, God with us. Jesus's body is the new temple. When the Son of God took on humanity, He "dwelt" (literally, "tabernacled") among us, a reference to the temple's precursor structure (1:14). Through His incarnate glory, Jesus revealed God to us because He is God (v. 18). There is no longer a need for a temple building since Jesus's sacrificial death fulfilled the old system (Heb. 10:12).

LEADER NOTE: The New Testament frequently portrays Jesus's resurrection as the capstone evidence for faith in Him. Paul told the Corinthians, "If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is in vain, and so is your faith" (1 Cor. 15:14). Seeing the resurrected Christ was what finally drove Thomas to fall at His feet and proclaim, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). Likewise for Mary Magdalene, recognizing the risen Jesus was what caused her to cling to Him and bear witness about Him (vv. 16-18). When people ask why they should trust Jesus, among the best reasons we can give is His resurrection from the dead.

How did you become convinced that Jesus truly rose from the dead?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

RESURRECTION: Both the Old and New Testaments teach that one day believers will experience a resurrection of the body from the dead (Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:12-14; John 11). The promise of the resurrection is found in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and it will take place at the future return of Christ. Because Christ was the firstfruits of the resurrection, Christians can be assured that their resurrection will be similar in nature, both bodily and glorious (Phil. 3:20-21; Rom. 8:22-23). The hope of the future resurrection gives Christians confidence that death has been defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ.

ARRIVAL

SURVEY: Invite the group to share responses to this question: “When, in your experience, has someone you considered to be kind, gentle, laid back, or funny surprised you with a display of firmness or anger? What was your response?”

CONTEXT

TRANSITION: Many people have an idea of laid back, gentle Jesus based on His miracles and teachings on God’s love. Bible stories like this one, where Jesus took an unyielding stance on holiness and worship, might seem out of character for “the Jesus we know.” It important for us not to shy away from the “hard stories.” Instead, we can dig deeper to learn more about our Savior.

SUMMARIZE: Following the first miracle Jesus performed, He spent some days with His mother, brothers, and disciples in Capernaum. Afterward, He wasted no time establishing His authority, not through the awe of miracle making but through His firm, authoritative actions and words. In addition to the compassionate, giving Man who cared about wedding guests, our study today reveals the God-man also was motivated by a fierce zeal for holiness and purity.

RECAP

ASK: From your personal preparation this week, what stood out to you in these short amount of verses? Why do you think Jesus felt compelled to establish His authority over the worship in the temple? Why might Jesus have used this opportunity to testify to His resurrection before it happened?

TRANSITION: Let’s take a deeper look at the significance of Jesus establishing His authority over how we worship God for a better understanding of what authority over God’s house has to do with the physical body, both for Jesus and for His followers.



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Key Concept: Jesus has the authority to purify all things because it all belongs to Him.

GROUP ACTIVITY

COMPARE: Direct the group to the “Establishing Authority” chart in their Personal Study Guide (PSG) on page 102, and duplicate the chart on a board. Explain that they will analyze how Jesus conflicted and confronted people with His claims of divine authority, often producing confusion or consternation in His audience, though many believed.

JOHN 2:13-22	MATTHEW 12:1-14
ACTIONS	
WORDS	
SCRIPTURAL BASIS	
SIGN	

DESIGNATE: Form two groups. Assign each group one of the Bible passages to read and identify key words or summaries for each of the categories listed. Have each person fill out their own chart and discuss answers with their group.

READ: Coming back to the large group, invite a volunteer to read John 2:13-22.

DESCRIBE: Call on a volunteer from the John group to share the information from their column. Invite the group to characterize the responses of the people at that time, and note them on the board. Encourage the group to share their personal reactions upon reading the story the first time.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 12:1-14.

DESCRIBE: Call on a volunteer from the Matthew group to share the information from their column. Invite the group to characterize these responses, and write them on the board. Encourage the group to share their own impressions of this Bible story.

Notes

JEWISH SECTS IN JESUS'S DAY		
WHY THEY MATTER	HOW THEY VIEWED JESUS	HOW THEY VIEWED THE TEMPLE
Scribes One of the most elite and influential groups in the Jewish community. They were responsible for teaching and interpreting the Law of Moses. They were also the primary teachers of the people.	They were divided by their views on Jesus. Some saw Him as a blasphemer, while others saw Him as a prophet.	They viewed the Temple as a place of worship and a center of learning. They were responsible for maintaining the Temple and its rituals.
Pharisees A group of Jewish teachers and leaders who emphasized strict adherence to the Law of Moses and the oral traditions of the rabbis. They were known for their piety and devotion to the Law.	They were divided by their views on Jesus. Some saw Him as a blasphemer, while others saw Him as a prophet.	They viewed the Temple as a place of worship and a center of learning. They were responsible for maintaining the Temple and its rituals.
Sadducees A group of Jewish teachers and leaders who were members of the priestly class. They were known for their wealth and power, and they were responsible for the Temple and its rituals.	They were divided by their views on Jesus. Some saw Him as a blasphemer, while others saw Him as a prophet.	They viewed the Temple as a place of worship and a center of learning. They were responsible for maintaining the Temple and its rituals.
Zealots A group of Jewish teachers and leaders who were known for their extreme devotion to the Law of Moses and the Temple. They were responsible for maintaining the Temple and its rituals.	They were divided by their views on Jesus. Some saw Him as a blasphemer, while others saw Him as a prophet.	They viewed the Temple as a place of worship and a center of learning. They were responsible for maintaining the Temple and its rituals.

DELVE: Compare the two stories and how they presented Jesus's authority. Point out that in John, Jesus outlined a very significant sign of His authority, which would come later—His resurrection.

DISCUSS: Why might people struggle to imagine Jesus turning over tables and driving out money changers with a whip?

ANALYZE: Not only was Jesus zealous about holiness and purity of worship, He had the credentials to issue a higher calling. Pass out copies of **Pack Item 13: Jewish Sects in Jesus's Day** and discuss how Jesus challenged the sects and authorities that influenced the Jews (*the Scriptures point to Jesus; Jesus's resurrection confirmed His authority; Jesus exhibited true zeal*). While some will always reject His claims, Jesus painstakingly showed the faithful His authority.

DEBRIEF

When have you seen zeal for God's house lead to reform?

In the management of your own temple—your physical body where the Holy Spirit dwells—are there steps you need to take to keep it holy?

SUMMARIZE

Jesus's resurrection would prove His authority over how worship should be done. His zeal for purity and holiness means that we too must be zealous to protect worship in God's house from being jeopardized by greed, dishonesty, pride, and injustice.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 103). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

 **HEAD:** The temple's transition from a sanctuary of worship to a center of commerce likely was a gradual one. We too can drift from God's standard of holiness. Before we can correct the drift, our lives must be compared to Jesus's perfect standard—akin to what occurred when Jesus cleansed the temple.

In what areas of life are you most prone to drift from God's standards of holiness?

 **HEART:** The path to restoring our zeal for Christ begins with submitting to His cleansing. Unlike the Jewish leaders, who resisted His authority and demanded He prove His right to purify the temple, we should submit voluntarily to His purifying power. Pray with David, "God, create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10).

Key Concept: Jesus has the authority to purify all things because it all belongs to Him.

Notes

What hinders you from confessing to Jesus the areas in which you have drifted and asking Him to restore you?



HANDS: We do not pursue zeal for Christ and holy living to win God's favor. The only way to achieve right standing before God is to place our faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Then we zealously pursue holy living as an expression of our gratitude and commitment. People in your circle of friends and family need to know these truths.

How will you initiate a conversation this week with someone about their need to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Consider whether you have a zeal for God's house in the manner of Jesus and what you can do personally to maintain its purity.
- Assess your church for impurities through prayer. Determine, also through prayer, how you can help promote holiness and zeal for worship.
- In giving thought to your body as the temple of the Holy Spirit, conduct a self-check on how you manage and protect your physical body.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 103 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 69:9-13 with your group. Acknowledge your own zeal for worship and lean into prayer, thanking God for His love.

References

1. J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol. 1 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 104.

BIRTH TO REBIRTH

CORE PASSAGE: JOHN 3:5-8,14-21

CONTEXT

Early in Jesus’s public ministry, large crowds followed Him. Yet their faith was inadequate. They were interested in Jesus—particularly in the miracles He performed—but not committed to Him. Because of their shallow faith, Jesus did not “entrust himself” to them (John 2:24). Jesus’s conversation with a man named Nicodemus in John 3 explains what true, saving faith in Jesus truly entails.

KEY CONCEPT

Salvation requires being born again by the Holy Spirit and believing in Jesus Christ.

As you examine John 3:5-8,14-21:

- Note that being born again of the Spirit is necessary for entering the kingdom of God.
- Meditate on God’s gift that believing Jesus died on the cross for our sins results in eternal life.



TIMELINE

John Baptizes Jesus
in the Jordan River
(Matthew 3:13-17)

Jesus Performs His First Miracle at
the Wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11)

SESSION STUDY:
Nicodemus Visits Jesus at Night
(John 3:1-21)

Jesus Calls Disciples to Follow Him
(John 1:35-51)

Jesus Cleanses the Temple
(John 2:13-22)

John the Baptist Scales Back
His Ministry (John 3:22-36)

Daily Readings

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: John 3:1-2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: John 3:14-17 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: John 3:3-8 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: John 3:18-21 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: John 3:9-13 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 18 |



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

WE ARE BORN AGAIN THROUGH THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (JOHN 3:5-8).

Underline each mention of being born of the Spirit.

5 Jesus answered, “Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6** Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. **8** The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

Jesus told Nicodemus, a Pharisee, that being born again is necessary for entering the kingdom of God (v. 3). That statement confused Nicodemus, so Jesus explained the requirement with different words: being “born of water and the Spirit” (v. 5). That phrase has drawn a range of interpretations, several of which may carry elements of truth. But the chief meaning of the phrase is grounded in the Old Testament.

The prophet Ezekiel foretold a day when God’s people would be cleansed from “all [their] impurities” by the “clean water” of God. That meant putting off old, sinful ways. God’s people also would be indwelt by God’s Spirit, who would cause them to follow the Lord (Ezek. 36:25-27). Being born of water and the Spirit means being freed from patterns of sin and set on the path of loving God. As being “born of the flesh” yields physical life, so being “born of the Spirit” should result in spiritual fruit.

LEADER NOTE: Being born of the Spirit is referenced in other parts of Scripture with different wordings. Paul called each believer “a new creation” in whom “the old has passed away” and “the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17). Elsewhere, Paul wrote that God “made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses” (Eph. 2:5). James and Peter, like John, referred to believers’ new spiritual life as a new birth (see Jas. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:3). Theologians refer to God’s imparting of new spiritual life as regeneration. It is entirely a work of God that humans cannot aid or merit.

What types of spiritual fruit should be visible if a person has been born again by the Holy Spirit?

Being born again is God's gracious work in each believer. We do not contribute to our new spiritual birth any more than we contributed to our physical birth. At the same time, humans are not entirely passive in the reception of salvation. Jesus emphasized this point by stating, "You must be born again" (John 3:7). Humans are commanded to receive new spiritual life through the Holy Spirit's work. No one is exempt from this obligation to repent of sins and be transformed by the Spirit.

To explain the Spirit's transformation of humans, Jesus urged Nicodemus to consider the analogy of wind. We don't see its origin or when it stops, yet we are very much aware of its existence. Salvation is similar. Some facets of it are mysterious, yet new spiritual life for all who come to Jesus by faith is an unquestionable reality. The good news of Jesus is proclaimed, the wind of God's Spirit stirs human hearts, and they are transformed with new spiritual life.

LEADER NOTE: The comparison between wind and the Spirit would have had increased significance for the original readers of John's Gospel in Greek. The Greek word *pneuma* can be translated as "wind," "breath," and "spirit," suggesting a link between these concepts. Likewise in Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament, the word *ruah* carries both meanings. Jesus may have been alluding to the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37:1-14, where God's breath entered dead bones and brought them to life, picturing the spiritual life God would impart to His people. As God breathed life into Adam physically (Gen. 2:7), the Holy Spirit of God breathes spiritual life into men and women who formerly were dead spiritually (Eph. 2:1).

How can you help others who don't understand what it means to receive new spiritual life?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

REGENERATION: Regeneration takes place at the beginning of the Christian life and is the miraculous transformation, or the new birth, that takes place within an individual through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5). It is the divine side of conversion (a person turning to Christ in repentance and faith), being the work of God within a person's life that causes him or her to be born again, a work that human effort is unable to produce.

WE ARE GIVEN ETERNAL LIFE THROUGH BELIEVING IN JESUS CHRIST (JOHN 3:14-21).

Circle the results of believing in Jesus in the passage. Then underline the results of failing to believe in Jesus.

14 “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, **15** so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. **16** For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. **18** Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. **19** This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. **20** For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed. **21** But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God.”

Here Jesus alluded to an episode in Israel’s wilderness wanderings in which the people grumbled against God and Moses. Consequently, God sent serpents to bite the Israelites, and many died. When the people confessed their sin and pleaded for mercy, God told Moses to raise up a bronze serpent on a pole. Any snake-bitten person who looked at the bronze serpent would live (Num. 21:4-9). Continued life was a merciful gift from God. Looking at the bronze serpent was the means to receive that merciful gift. Likewise, believing Jesus died on the cross for our sins is not a work that earns eternal life. It is the means of receiving eternal life.

Jesus’s mission to offer eternal life to sinners was the result of God’s love for the world. John 3:16 emphasizes both the way God demonstrated His love and the intensity of that love. “For God loved the world in this way,” He gave His Son to experience humiliation, torture, and death for the salvation of humanity.

LEADER NOTE: Christians have long discussed the relationship between regeneration (receiving new spiritual life) and faith. Does one precede the other? Scripture’s basic answer is clear: Regeneration and faith are two sides of the same coin. At the same moment a person places their faith in Jesus, the Spirit enlivens a person spiritually, and that person receives eternal life. Paul described both the divine and human roles in salvation when he wrote, “You are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift” (Eph. 2:8).

How would you explain what it means to believe in Jesus?

Notes

GOSPEL CONNECTION

x ————— x
Because of His love, God sent His Son, Jesus, to sacrifice His life for us so that we might be born again and have eternal life.

Despite God's love for the entire world, humanity is divided into two groups. Some believe in Jesus and are saved from condemnation. Their sins are applied to Jesus's account and regarded by the Father as punished on the cross (2 Cor. 5:21). Other people are "already condemned" (John 3:18) by their sin and compound that condemnation by refusing to accept the only means of salvation offered by God—faith in His Son.

Those who hear the good news of salvation and reject Jesus ultimately are not rejecting Jesus for intellectual reasons. Rather, their deeds are evil; they simply enjoy their lifestyle apart from God. They flee from Jesus because they fear the exposure of their true character. In contrast, those who trust Jesus as Savior come to Jesus because they are grieved by their sin and know that only Jesus can help them. They are sinners saved by grace with lives that now bear godly fruit because of the Spirit's work in them.

LEADER NOTE: The Greek language of the New Testament had no quotation marks. Consequently, it is difficult to know at what point in John 3 Jesus stopped speaking and John began commenting on Jesus's words. Some Bible versions place the break after verse 15 while others place it after verse 21 and others in a different location. Our interpretation of the passage remains consistent regardless of where Jesus stopped speaking. "All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16). Therefore, everything written in John 3 is the perfect Word of God, whether it is a quotation of Jesus or the Spirit-inspired commentary of John on Jesus's words.

How should our view of the condemnation facing nonbelievers affect our willingness to share the gospel with others?

Notes

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: As your group arrives, ask this ice-breaker question: “Salvation aside, can you think of something that you have had an epiphany about that completely changed what you thought you knew? It could be about a film, a book, restaurant, ball team, or a change in taste so that you now enjoy a food that you used to hate? What happened to make you change your mind?”

TRANSITION: It's entirely possible to have a change of heart or mind, but typically there is some type of catalyst to make it happen. In our story today, Nicodemus had noted Jesus's miracles and teaching and came to Him for answers about what he once thought he knew.

CONTEXT

SAY: Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus under the cloak of darkness to investigate His identity. Nicodemus readily acknowledged that Jesus was a teacher from God because, as he said, no one could do what Jesus did apart from God (v. 2), but his training made him skeptical, if not cynical. When Jesus proposed the idea of a necessary new birth, Nicodemus scoffed at the unimaginable picture of a grown person re-entering his mother's womb. So in response, Jesus offered an explanation on the meaning of spiritual rebirth.

RECAP

STATE: Jesus's description of spiritual regeneration as a wholly supernatural transformation challenged Nicodemus's understanding of how to be right with God. *(Pass out copies of Pack Item 14: Work of the Spirit and briefly review how the Holy Spirit works in our regeneration and in our lives as believers.)*

ASK: Jesus used several physical descriptors to try to help us understand what is a wholly spiritual process. Which ones stood out to you from the passage as you prepared this week?

RECITE: Point out that in His meeting with Nicodemus, Jesus spoke one of the most famous and familiar verses in Scripture: John 3:16. Invite the group to say it together, whether from memory or reading from their Personal Study Guide.



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 Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify
ministrygrid.com/gospelproject · gospelproject.com/leader-training.

Key Concept: Salvation requires being born again by the Holy Spirit and believing in Jesus Christ.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

CHART: Draw attention to “The Nature of Spiritual Rebirth” chart on page 110 in the Personal Study Guide (PSG). Replicate the chart on a board.

The Nature of Spiritual Rebirth

Read the passages. In the columns below, write out words or phrases to compare our old sinful nature and the new nature of those born by the Spirit.

	OLD NATURE	NEW NATURE
John 3:5-8		
Romans 6:5-8		
Romans 8:1-12		
Galatians 6:13-15		
Ephesians 4:22-27		

SAY: To receive a new nature, there must be a birthing point in each of our lives. It will not and cannot happen without the work of the Holy Spirit, who convicts us of sin and calls us to repentance through belief in Jesus Christ.

DIRECT: Form five smaller groups and assign each group a Bible passage to read and discuss along the lines of “old nature” and “new nature”: John 3:5-8; Romans 6:5-8; Romans 8:1-12; Galatians 6:13-15; and Ephesians 4:22-27.

REGROUP: Direct each group to summarize briefly their Scripture passage. Instruct them to identify insights about our old sinful nature compared to our new nature that we receive from the Holy Spirit. Write down their findings on the chart and encourage groups to fill in their charts as needed, citing the Scripture passages.

CLARIFY: When we repent and place our faith in Jesus Christ, we are immediately justified—saved from our sin and made right with God. While we live on earth, however, we still struggle against our sin nature.

ENGAGE: Considering that spiritual rebirth is essentially a divine transformation, if you have received Christ, how would you describe that process to this group? What are some spiritual disciplines that can make the fight against our old sinful nature more successful?

HIGHLIGHT: Draw attention to John 3:17 and point out that while Jesus's purpose was not to consign people to death but to draw them to God and eternal life, it is true that not believing in Jesus leads to condemnation.

DEBRIEF

How does the fact that spiritual rebirth comes from God through the Spirit encourage you?

As faith is the human response for salvation, how would you define it, and why?

SUMMARIZE

Jesus challenged a religious leader with the notion that entering God's kingdom requires not a work of knowledge but a divine spiritual transformation. No doubt this upended Nicodemus's suppositions and caused him to look inward. We have evidence that Nicodemus may have taken that message to heart because after Jesus's death, he accompanied Joseph of Arimathea, who asked for Jesus's body. Nicodemus brought seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes to prepare His body for the tomb (John 19:39). This same challenge is for all to consider, both those who presume to be religious and those who aren't—to enter God's kingdom, we must be born again.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 111). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: We can learn various Bible stories through our church attendance without ever learning the Bible's central story: how to receive eternal life by believing in Jesus. Jesus chastised Nicodemus for lacking that very knowledge. Being born again, believing, and receiving eternal life are too important to leave unclear in your mind.

How would you explain what it means to believe in Jesus and receive eternal life to someone like Nicodemus?



HEART: The Bible commands us to examine ourselves for evidence of new spiritual life (2 Cor. 13:5). People who have been born again through the work of the Holy Spirit will exhibit "the fruit of the Spirit," such as love, joy, and peace, in increasing measure (Gal. 5:22-23). Followers of Jesus are not perfect, but they are becoming more like Him on their spiritual journey.

How does your life give evidence that you've been transformed by the Holy Spirit?



HANDS: The news about eternal life in Jesus is too important to keep to ourselves. As Jesus explained to Nicodemus how to be born again, God calls each believer to explain to others how they can experience new spiritual life. Consider how a phone call, lunch conversation, or coffee appointment might give you an opportunity to explain the gospel of Jesus.

With whom will you talk about a life-changing relationship with Jesus?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

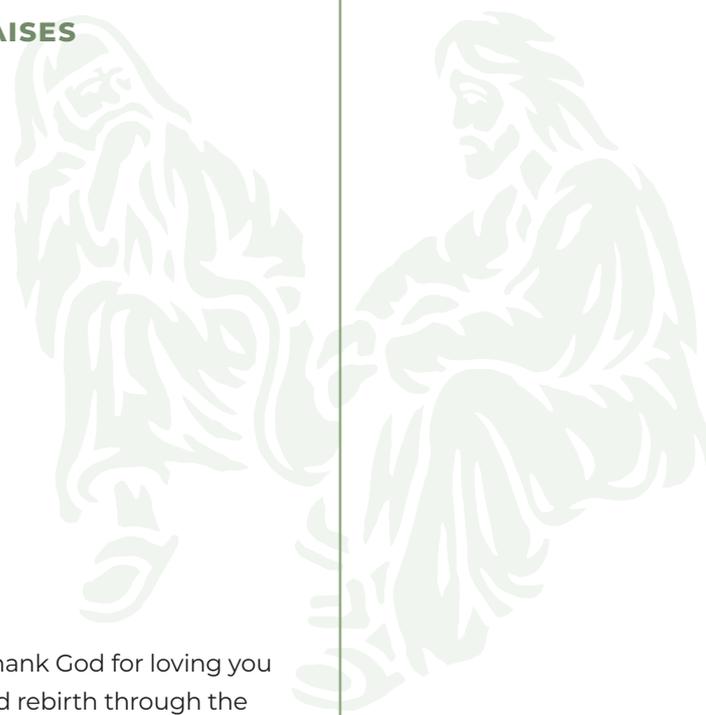
- Spend time meditating on 1 John 4:7–5:13 to review the earmarks of spiritual rebirth and confirm that you are confident in your new (not perfect) nature.
- Understanding that we will always be a work in progress in this life, what are some needed spiritual developments in your life?
- Determine to share this week the message that Jesus communicated with someone who is struggling with a problem. Consider using John 3:16-17 as a starting point.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 111 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 18:31-36 with your group. Thank God for loving you and saving you from sin. Praise Him for our salvation and rebirth through the Holy Spirit.



HEAVEN TO EARTH

CORE PASSAGE: JOHN 3:25-36

CONTEXT

Jesus began to attract a crowd after His first miracle and driving out the money changers in the temple. Not long after meeting with Nicodemus, Jesus and His disciples went out to preach the message of the kingdom. Jesus and John the Baptist found themselves baptizing in the same vicinity with crowds flocking to each. John the Baptist's disciples questioned Jesus's rise in prominence, and John took that moment to explain that true joy comes from glorifying Jesus, the Son of God.

KEY CONCEPT

Belief involves acknowledging the supremacy of Jesus.

As you examine John 3:25-36:

- Note that John understood that he was the messenger, not the Messiah.
- Recognize that believers lift up Jesus and humble themselves so that He gets the glory.



TIMELINE

John the Baptist Calls People to Repentance in Preparation for Jesus and Baptizes Jesus (Matthew 3:1-17)

Jesus Cleanses the Temple (John 2:13-22)

SESSION STUDY:
John the Baptist Scales Back His Ministry (John 3:22-36)

Jesus Performs His First Miracle at the Wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11)

Nicodemus Visits Jesus at Night (John 3:1-21)

Jesus Speaks with a Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-42)

Daily Readings

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: John 3:22-24 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: John 3:31-34 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: John 3:25-26 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: John 3:35-36 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: John 3:27-30 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 45 |



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

BELIEF IN CHRIST INVOLVES HUMBLING OURSELVES BEFORE HIM (JOHN 3:25-30).

Underline words and phrases that indicate how John’s disciples felt about Jesus. Highlight words and phrases that show how John felt about Jesus. Note the contrast between John’s feelings and those of his disciples.

25 Then a dispute arose between John’s disciples and a Jew about purification. **26** So they came to John and told him, “Rabbi, the one you testified about, and who was with you across the Jordan, is baptizing—and everyone is going to him.” **27** John responded, “No one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from heaven. **28** You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah, but I’ve been sent ahead of him.’ **29** He who has the bride is the groom. But the groom’s friend, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the groom’s voice. So this joy of mine is complete. **30** He must increase, but I must decrease.”

We are not given much information about the dispute between John’s disciples and an unnamed Jew over Jewish purification rites. But somehow that discussion drew John’s disciples to the topic of baptism. They noted that Jesus was baptizing “across the Jordan” on the eastern shore, though John 4:2 explains Jesus’s disciples did the baptizing. The envy of John’s disciples was palpable in their exaggerated statement, “Everyone is going to him” (3:26). John’s crowds were smaller than Jesus’s crowds, and John’s disciples didn’t like it.

John made two key points in response. First, he said everything is from God—our gifts, callings, positions, and even the results of the ministry God assigns each person. People have resources at their disposal only as God permits. Desiring greater prominence is like telling the Lord He erred in the calling He assigned us. Second, John acknowledged he was a messenger, not the Messiah. He was the one prophesied to “prepare the way of the LORD” (Isa. 40:3).

LEADER NOTE: In our day and age, with social media and the need to find fame and popularity, the temptation to put ourselves above Christ and His will is great for anyone who has a cell phone. We all want to be heard and to be seen as skilled, eloquent, beautiful, thought-provoking, or right. Even with ministry intent, we always need to make sure our hearts are truly in the right place when we share on social media or by word of mouth, uplifting Christ in all things, not our personal agenda or desires. Our actions should aim for God’s glory, not our own.

How can you find contentment with the circumstances God assigned you rather than desiring greater prominence?

John the Baptist used a parable to explain his attitude toward Jesus. John was like “the groom’s friend” at a first-century Judean wedding (John 3:29), roughly equivalent to what we would call the best man. He assisted the groom with every detail of the wedding, organizing and presiding over the festivities. If he drew the spotlight away from the groom, then he failed in his role. If the groom drew focus and experienced joy, he succeeded.

In this regard, John the Baptist is a model for all followers of Jesus. As believers, we lift up Christ and humble ourselves before Him. John’s statement that “He must increase, but I must decrease” (v. 30) was not a statement merely of what John should do. Rather, it was a statement of the Lord’s plan. True joy comes not when the spotlight shines brightest on us; it comes when we shine the spotlight on Jesus.

LEADER NOTE: Living to glorify Jesus rather than ourselves is not an optional add-on to the Christian life. It is the essence of the Christian life. In the parable of the sower, Jesus taught that those who focus on their own worries, wealth, and desires lack true faith, even if they claim for a time to believe in Jesus. Those who receive Christ’s Word and honor Him by bearing spiritual fruit possess saving faith (Mark 4:18-20). Paul wrote that eventually “every knee will bow” and “every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:10-11). Some humble themselves now before Jesus voluntarily. All others will humble themselves before Him involuntarily as they bear eternal judgment.

What does glorifying Jesus rather than yourself mean practically in your current season of life?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Jesus is the Messiah and God the Son, coming from above to give eternal life to those who believe in Him, so He is worthy to be put first in our lives.

WE HUMBLE OURSELVES BECAUSE CHRIST IS SUPREME

(JOHN 3:31-36).

Highlight phrases describing the supremacy of Jesus, denoting either His attributes or His actions.

31 The one who comes from above is above all. The one who is from the earth is earthly and speaks in earthly terms. The one who comes from heaven is above all. **32** He testifies to what he has seen and heard, and yet no one accepts his testimony. **33** The one who has accepted his testimony has affirmed that God is true. **34** For the one whom God sent speaks God's words, since he gives the Spirit without measure. **35** The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hands. **36** The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him.

After John the Baptist fulfilled his mission of exalting Jesus, he faded from the narrative, mostly because Herod arrested him (cf. v. 24). Verse 31 begins an extended commentary on the supremacy of Jesus over all things and all people.

Jesus is above all for various reasons. Among them, He “comes from heaven” (v. 31); He is God, but God come in human form. So Jesus is fully God and fully man. And He came to “[testify] to what he has seen and heard” (v. 32), to the reality of God and the truth of God’s plan, but His testimony is often rejected. Yet those who do accept it know that “God is true” (v. 33) because Jesus fulfilled the promises of old that the Messiah would bring God’s salvation.

LEADER NOTE: John’s Gospel emphasizes Jesus’s deity throughout: “In the beginning,” Jesus “was with God” and “was God” (1:1). His submission to the Father’s instructions did not make Him any less divine than God the Father (5:19). Jesus possesses “life in himself” (5:26); no other person brought Him into existence, and He needs no one to sustain His existence. Jesus’s repeated “I am” statements in John (“I am the gate” [10:9]; “I am the true vine” [15:1]) highlight that Jesus is the great “I AM” of the Old Testament (Ex. 3:14).

What do you think is the most compelling reason to believe Jesus is God and supreme over all things?

Verse 34 adds another reason to humble ourselves before Jesus: His authority to speak God's Word. The Old Testament prophets received the measure of God's Spirit needed to fulfill their missions. Jesus, in contrast, was given the Spirit's power without limit (v. 34). The Father "has given all things into his hands" (v. 35) so that Jesus can announce to us the Word of God. This far exceeded the ministry of any Old Testament prophet. On occasion, the Lord would reveal to a prophet a message, which he would announce by saying, "Thus says the LORD." With Jesus, every single word that came from His mouth was the Lord speaking.

The appropriate response to Jesus's supremacy is faith. Indeed, believing in Jesus results in eternal life. The type of belief in view is not mere mental ascent to the facts about Jesus, though that is included. Saving faith in Jesus entails trusting Him alone as the Master of our lives. People who do not place Jesus on the throne of their lives will not experience eternal life in God's kingdom. Instead, they will experience the eternal, just punishment their sin deserves.

LEADER NOTE: Skeptics have questioned the notion that God could be wrathful toward anyone. They recoil even more strongly at the notion God could be wrathful toward anyone for eternity. But that is precisely what Scripture teaches will befall everyone who lives for self rather than receiving the offer of mercy available through Jesus. Sinning against an infinitely holy and awesome God deserves infinite punishment. That is why Jesus referred to hell, in eternal terms, as a place where the "worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48).

What are some common reasons people reject Jesus's offer of eternal life?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

FAITH: Biblical faith is the resting or trusting in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

ARRIVAL

INTERACT: Invite the group to share jobs or roles they have accepted with an understanding that they would not be the lead person, boss, or supervisor. Ask: “How did it make you feel not to be considered as the lead? By show of hands, which of these words best describes your experience or perception of being the one who supports a leader rather than being the one in charge: satisfied, relieved, or frustrated?”

CONTEXT

SAY: John the Baptist, a unique character who clothed himself in animal skins and ate locusts and wild honey, had a unique mind-set regarding his ministry. As Jesus's relative, John successfully waded into ministry ahead of Jesus, preaching in the wilderness, prophesying about the coming Messiah, calling people to repentance of sin, and baptizing them in the Jordan River. In the process, he amassed a group of followers who supported his ministry. By the time of this account, Jesus had been baptized by John, which served as the public launch of Christ's personal ministry. Soon after, in addition to John the Baptist, Jesus's disciples were also baptizing new believers.

TRANSITION: In the landscape of multiple ministry sites and prophetic voices that were now taking place and being heard, John's disciples realized they needed to try to reconcile their part in this new paradigm taking shape. In this passage, they received a powerful lesson from John the Baptist on why and how to support the rightful leader and heir to God's throne.

RECAP

SUMMARIZE: On a board, write two words to help the group recall the story: “problem” and “resolution.” Call on a volunteer to summarize in one sentence the problem recorded in the passage and another to summarize John's response. Write the synopses on the board. Avoid adding more details as they will be discussed through the group activity.

TRANSITION: John the Baptist's response was not just an explanation on the doctrine of the supremacy of Jesus but a lesson on how to be a servant who recognizes that the Messiah is and always will be greater than the messenger.



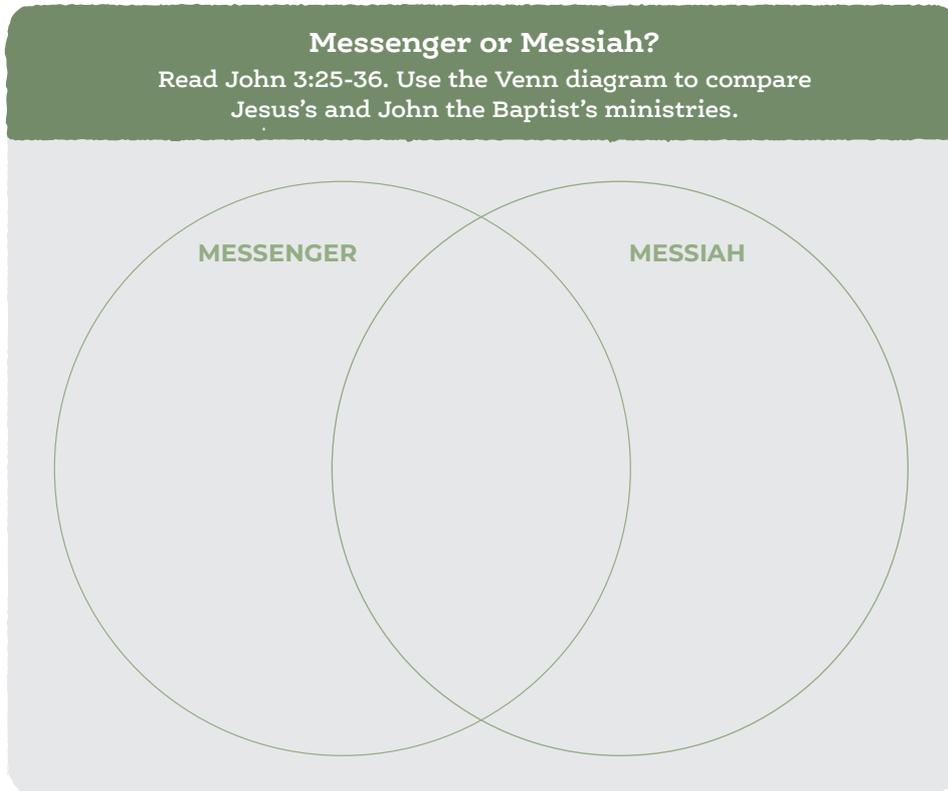
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GROUP ACTIVITY

DIAGRAM: Point out the “Messenger or Messiah?” diagram on page 118 in the Personal Study Guide (PSG). Replicate the Venn diagram on the board to write down notes as the group discusses the Scripture passage.



CONTEXT: Mention that both Jesus and John the Baptist had acquired a considerable following. Even the religious leaders questioned whether John the Baptist was the Messiah. Though John repeatedly asserted that he was not the Messiah but the messenger, his own disciples were concerned with Jesus’s popularity among the people.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read John 3:25-36.

DISCUSS: Guide the group to compare and contrast Jesus’s and John the Baptist’s ministries. Ask: “In what ways were they similar?” (*both were sent by God; both were prophesied about in the Old Testament; both were Spirit-filled; both called people to repent of their sins*) “What traits were exclusive to John the Baptist?” (*he was born of earthly parents; he did not claim to be the Messiah; his ministry ended as Jesus’s began*) “What traits were exclusive to Jesus?” (*He came from heaven; He is the Son of God; He brings eternal life to those who believe in Him*) Encourage your group to write down their answers

in the PSG as you write them on the board, along with Scripture references that affirm their points. Highlight the implied sense of rivalry John's disciples felt and John the Baptist's response of deference to Jesus along with an attitude of joy and humility.

APPLY: As believers, have there been times when you've felt jealousy over how God was using someone else to grow His kingdom? When John the Baptist said Jesus must increase but he must decrease, he exhibited great humility as well as wisdom. Ask: "Why is it important for us to keep our attitudes and pride in check as we support a spiritual leader, ministry, or mission?"

DEBRIEF

What can we do to remind ourselves to adopt humility when it does not come easily?

What might have been the outcome if John the Baptist had chosen not to humble himself and elevate Jesus?

SUMMARIZE

Far beyond an exercise in humility or a lesson in leadership, John the Baptist shared that Christ deserves our total and complete allegiance and submission because He is supreme. In Christ alone, we have the opportunity for eternal life. As significant as his ministry was, John had limited resources to offer on his own. Yet his role was to point the way. John did it well because he understood Christ is supreme and through Him alone can we have eternal life.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 119). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Head** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: Acknowledging the supremacy of Jesus requires knowing the facts about Him. That means reading what the Bible teaches about Him, plugging into Bible studies with fellow believers, and utilizing other sound spiritual resources. Just as we cannot have relationships with people we know little about, our ignorance of Jesus limits our ability to walk with Him.

How might a lack of knowledge about Jesus limit your ability to believe in Him?



HEART: For John the Baptist, humbling himself meant pointing to Jesus as the Messiah and rejoicing when crowds went to Jesus. Humility before Christ takes different forms for us. For example, it means spending more time in prayer and Scripture and less time promoting ourselves on social media. It means praying for Jesus's will to materialize rather than asking Him to bless our selfish aspirations.

In what ways should you commit to humble yourself before Jesus?



HANDS: Exalting Christ as supreme is difficult in a culture that focuses on self. That's one reason followers of Jesus must encourage one another to be humble before Him. Praying for other believers, commending them for unseen acts of service, and worshiping Jesus alongside them are ways we can encourage others to acknowledge Christ's supremacy.

How will you encourage someone this week to have a humble attitude before Christ?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Prayerfully consider your own role and responsibilities in ministry, and assess your attitude toward the ministries of others. Pray John 3:30 as an affirmation or correction for your attitude toward Jesus and others.
- Re-examine your personal role as a messenger in sharing that Christ is supreme and the sole resource for eternal life. Recommit to your responsibility to share the gospel with others.
- Spend a few minutes meditating on the sober reminder that the wrath of God falls on those who reject Christ, and identify those who may need a fresh invitation to receive Him.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 119 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 45:6-7 with your group, praising God that His throne is forever because He is supreme in all things.

WATER TO LIVING WATER

CORE PASSAGE: JOHN 4:7-11,13-15,19-23,25-26

CONTEXT

In John 3, Jesus revealed to Nicodemus that belief in Jesus's death to pay for sins was required to enter the kingdom of God. In John 4, Jesus revealed to a non-Jewish woman with a sinful past that religious tribalism had no place in His mission to redeem sinners. Though Jews and Samaritans generally steered clear of one another, Jesus spoke with a Samaritan woman who needed the eternal satisfaction only He could bring.

KEY CONCEPT

Jesus came to give eternal life to all who believe in and worship Him.

As you examine John 4:7-11,13-15,19-23,25-26:

- Identify how Jesus crossed societal boundaries to share the gift of eternal life.
- Consider Jesus's assertion that true worship involves worshiping in Spirit and truth.



TIMELINE

Jesus Performs His First
Miracle at the Wedding in
Cana (John 2:1-11)

Nicodemus Visits Jesus at Night
(John 3:1-21)

**SESSION STUDY: Jesus Speaks with a
Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-42)**

Jesus Cleanses the Temple
(John 2:13-22)

John the Baptist Scales Back
His Ministry (John 3:22-36)

Jesus Performs His Second
Miracle in Cana (John 4:46-54)

Daily Readings

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: John 4:1-10 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: John 4:27-38 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: John 4:11-18 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: John 4:39-42 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: John 4:19-26 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 42 |



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

JESUS GIVES US LIVING WATER (JOHN 4:7-11,13-15).

Highlight each reference to drinking or water. Note whether each reference seems to be literal or figurative.

7 A woman of Samaria came to draw water. “Give me a drink,” Jesus said to her, **8** because his disciples had gone into town to buy food. **9** “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” she asked him. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans. **10** Jesus answered, “If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would ask him, and he would give you living water.” **11** “Sir,” said the woman, “you don’t even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this ‘living water’? . . . **13** Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. **14** But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life.” **15** “Sir,” the woman said to him, “give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and come here to draw water.”

Jesus and His disciples paused their journey to rest in a Samaritan village called Sychar (vv. 3-5). Jesus sat by a well “about noon” (v. 6), when a woman approached to draw water. This was unusual because women generally drew water at the beginning or end of the day when it was cooler, and they generally drew water in groups. With the disciples on an errand to buy food (v. 8), Jesus asked the woman for a drink.

The woman felt surprised Jesus would even talk with her. The disdain between Jews and Samaritans ran deep, and Jewish animosity toward Samaritan women could be particularly acute. Her surprise increased when Jesus offered her “living water” (v. 10), a phrase that could signify either fresh, running water from a spring or refreshing salvation from God (see Isa. 55:1-2; Jer. 2:13; Zech. 14:8). The woman’s initial response revealed she was thinking only of literal water. But Jesus was sharing with her that He gives the gift of eternal life.

LEADER NOTE: The mutual dislike between Jews and Samaritans had both ethnic and religious roots. Samaritans descended from Israelites in the Northern Kingdom of Israel and foreigners brought into the land by the Assyrians after they conquered Israel in 722 BC. Religiously, Samaritans accepted only their version of the first five books of the Old Testament and adopted different worship practices than the Jews. This led Jews to regard Samaritans as tainted by impurity on multiple levels.

Key Concept: Jesus came to give eternal life to all who believe in and worship Him.

With what groups of people do you feel reluctant to share the gospel? Why?

Notes

CHURCH CONNECTION

Jesus crossed barriers to share the truth of Himself and the gospel. As believers today, we are to do the same, taking the gospel of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

By speaking of recurring thirst, Jesus noted that nothing in this world can satisfy the human soul. The author of Ecclesiastes captured this sentiment vividly when he wrote: “‘Absolute futility,’ says the Teacher. ‘Absolute futility. Everything is futile’” (Eccl. 1:2). True and abiding satisfaction comes only from the salvation Jesus offers. The psalmist put it like this: “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so I long for you, God” (Ps. 42:1).

Jesus satisfies the thirst in our souls not by removing it. Rather, He places a self-replenishing spring of spiritual refreshment inside each person who trusts Him as Lord and Savior. That spring is the Holy Spirit. In John’s Gospel, the gift of living water is understood to be the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus would pronounce before a crowd in Jerusalem, “The one who believes in me . . . will have streams of living water flow from deep within him” (John 7:38). John added that “he said this about the Spirit” (v. 39).

LEADER NOTE: Believers draw ongoing satisfaction from the Holy Spirit through spiritual disciplines, practices that build our connection with God. Reading the Scriptures gives us strength and nourishment (Ps. 1:1-2). Spending time with Jesus in prayer gives us energy to obey (John 15:5). Worshiping with other believers in a local church encourages us to resist sin (Heb. 10:24-25). Spiritual disciplines are like the straw through which we drink the living water of the Holy Spirit. Paul expressed the same notion with a different metaphor when he commanded us to “be filled by the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18).

How have you experienced the Holy Spirit’s spiritual refreshing in your life?

JESUS CLARIFIED WHAT WORSHIP IS AND THAT HE IS THE MESSIAH (JOHN 4:19-23,25-26).

Circle each statement Jesus made about worship.

19 “Sir,” the woman replied, “I see that you are a prophet. **20** Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem.” **21** Jesus told her, “Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. **22** You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. **23** But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship him. . . . **25** The woman said to him, “I know that the Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” **26** Jesus told her, “I, the one speaking to you, am he.”

Realizing Jesus was, at the very least, a prophet with some level of inspiration from God, the woman brought up a point of religious dispute between Jews and Samaritans. Jews recognized Jerusalem as the proper site of temple worship in keeping with God’s instructions to Moses, David, and Solomon. Samaritans, who only recognized their version of Genesis through Deuteronomy as Scripture, believed Mount Gerizim in Samaria was the proper site of worship. The woman wanted to know which viewpoint was correct.

Soon the answer would be neither, Jesus said, though He declared the Jews were correct about old covenant worship (v. 22). With Jesus’s coming, true worship was elevated beyond the visible and temporal realms. True worship now involves worshiping in Spirit and truth (v. 23). The only people able to render true worship are those given new spiritual life by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. These believers worship Jesus, the truth incarnate (14:6). God desires His people to worship in this way.

LEADER NOTE: Why did true worship transition from temple rituals to worshiping Jesus from any location? The Old Testament temple foreshadowed a reality that was fulfilled by Jesus. Under the Mosaic covenant, God manifested His presence to His people in the tabernacle and later the temple. When Jesus came, He “dwelt among us” (1:14). The Greek word for “dwelt” literally means “tabernacled.” Through Jesus, God manifests His presence most fully to humans. If we want to know God, we need only come to Jesus. Worship in an earthly temple pales in comparison to the divine presence we experience when we trust Jesus.

Key Concept: Jesus came to give eternal life to all who believe in and worship Him.

Notes

How does the health of our personal relationship with Jesus impact our ability to worship in Spirit and truth?

The woman realized Jesus's statements related to the coming Messiah, the One promised in the Old Testament who would remedy sin's curse. Samaritans expected the Messiah to be a teacher. He would be the prophet like Moses foretold in Deuteronomy who would "tell them everything" (Deut. 18:18). Because the Messiah was the great explainer, it was natural for the woman to anticipate he would explain the mysteries Jesus had presented.

Jesus responded by revealing Himself as the Messiah to the Samaritan woman. The phrase translated "I . . . am he" entails only two words in Greek translated "I am," the same two words used repeatedly by Jesus in John's Gospel to present Himself as the fulfillment of messianic expectations. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life" (6:35), "I am the gate" (10:7), and "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25). By making an "I am" statement to the Samaritan woman, Jesus revealed Himself as the fulfillment of the deepest hopes of Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles.

LEADER NOTE: Jesus declared Himself to be the Messiah to the Samaritan woman but told many others to keep silent about His identity. After Peter confessed Jesus as the Messiah, "he gave the disciples orders to tell no one" (Matt. 16:20). Similarly, Jesus told some people He healed to keep quiet about His identity (cf. Mark 1:44). Why the difference between those episodes and this one? The commands to keep silent most often occurred in Jewish territories, where those with misguided messianic expectations might try to make Jesus a political or military king. That could have incited the Romans against Him before the appointed hour of His crucifixion. There was no such danger among non-Jews. With the Samaritan woman, Jesus could announce His identity freely.

How can you take the gospel to people who do not realize Jesus is the Messiah?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

EVANGELISM: It is the duty and privilege of every Christian and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations. Missionary effort on the part of all is a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations.

Notes

WORK OF THE SPIRIT		
OLD TESTAMENT	PSALMS	NEW TESTAMENT
<p>1. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in the world, who is active in the hearts of men and women, and who is the source of all spiritual life and power.</p> <p>2. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in the world, who is active in the hearts of men and women, and who is the source of all spiritual life and power.</p> <p>3. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in the world, who is active in the hearts of men and women, and who is the source of all spiritual life and power.</p>	<p>1. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in the world, who is active in the hearts of men and women, and who is the source of all spiritual life and power.</p> <p>2. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in the world, who is active in the hearts of men and women, and who is the source of all spiritual life and power.</p> <p>3. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in the world, who is active in the hearts of men and women, and who is the source of all spiritual life and power.</p>	<p>1. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in the world, who is active in the hearts of men and women, and who is the source of all spiritual life and power.</p> <p>2. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in the world, who is active in the hearts of men and women, and who is the source of all spiritual life and power.</p> <p>3. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in the world, who is active in the hearts of men and women, and who is the source of all spiritual life and power.</p>

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: As people arrive, make a tally as you ask: “What is your favorite beverage to serve guests on a hot summer day? What do you want to drink after your stomach has settled from being nauseated for several hours? What do you crave when you are on the treadmill, running a marathon, or hiking for hours at a time?”

TRANSITION: We need fluids to keep us going, but our bodies naturally seem to thirst for the fluids that will be most satisfying and provide what we need. Likewise, our souls long for that which will quench our spiritual thirst, and there is only one option—the Holy Spirit (*recall Pack Item 14: Work of the Spirit*).

CONTEXT

SAY: Today’s story took place in Sychar, a town in Samaria, a region known in biblical times for the enmity that existed between Samaritans and Jews. Because of this, Jews often avoided travel through Samaria. Jesus, however, was not bound by such fleshly constraints and not only traveled through the area but stopped at Jacob’s well for refreshment. When Jesus arrived in Sychar at the well, the verses preceding our passage note that He was “worn out” and that the time was “about noon” (v. 6), a point in the day when most people did not usually come to the well.

RECAP

SUMMARIZE: As you go through the highlights of the passage, point out that the conversation that took place between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is an example of how to move from shallow small talk to the deep waters of communicating spiritual truths.

IDENTIFY: Encourage the group to pinpoint the move Jesus made that initiated the conversation and drew the woman into discussion before skillfully leading her into deeper spiritual waters.

TRANSITION: Our passage today represents a master class by Jesus in how to move a chance meeting into a divine encounter to fulfill His mission—to seek and to save those who are lost.



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Key Concept: Jesus came to give eternal life to all who believe in and worship Him.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

BOXES: Guide the group to page 126 of their Personal Study Guide (PSG) to the activity “Talk Around the Water Cooler.” Replicate the boxes on a board.

Talk Around the Water Cooler
Read John 4:7-26 and list how Jesus gave us an example to follow in having spiritual conversations.

TIP #1 	→	TIP #2
TIP #3 	→	TIP #4

SAY: Jesus’s discussion with the Samaritan woman can teach us how to turn a water-cooler conversation into a meaningful interaction by the example of how He progressed the conversation.

IDENTIFY: Invite a volunteer to read John 4:7-9. First mention Jesus’s decision to cross cultural and ethnic barriers to talk to a woman and a Samaritan. Direct the group to identify the first tip we learn from Jesus and the Samaritan woman’s conversation. (*ask a question—Jesus asked for a drink; talk about something common—Jesus talked about natural water*) Encourage the group to write down their conclusions on their chart under Tip #1.

IDENTIFY: Invite another volunteer to read John 4:10-14. Call the group to identify the pivot Jesus made from physical water to spiritual water and to write down their findings under Tip #2. (*find the person’s real need—Jesus moved the conversation from natural water to living water; move from a physical need to a spiritual one*)

DIG: Invite a third volunteer to read John 4:15-18. Note that Jesus referred to her questionable history in verses not featured in today's passage, but His knowledge of her made her realize her sin. Instruct the group to identify an example to follow and record their conclusions on the chart under Tip #3. (*when the other person realizes their need, help them know Jesus satisfies all our needs*)

IDENTIFY: Invite a final volunteer to read John 4:19-26. Note how Jesus moved from identifying her need to pointing to Himself as Messiah. Encourage your group to write down what Jesus did next as Tip #4. (*Jesus related what the woman knew to be true to an understanding of who He is; in sharing truth, the next step would be helping to relate what someone knows to the truth of Jesus*)

CONSIDER: Guide the group to make some guesses on how long Jesus may have remained at the well to talk to the woman, how fast the conversation went from common to significant, and how life changing it was, not only for the Samaritan woman but for the people she also talked to about Jesus.

DEBRIEF

What might keep us from turning common conversations into gospel sharing opportunities?

SUMMARIZE

We can follow Jesus's example to make what may seem like a chance encounter into an opportunity to get to spiritual matters. In doing so, we are not only obedient to Christ's command to share the gospel, but we can help meet the deep spiritual need for living water for people who may not know they need it.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 127). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: The woman at the well learned that Jesus fulfilled the Bible's promises. That was a life-changing experience for her. It can be for us as well. Knowledge of Jesus lays a foundation for us to trust in Jesus. Think about where your knowledge of evidence of Jesus is lacking and how you can spend more time studying so you're able to answer others' questions.

What are some ways you can study about Jesus to know Him more deeply?



HEART: Jesus offered the Samaritan woman living water to satisfy her soul. That same refreshment is available to every follower of Jesus. The Holy Spirit lives inside each believer and gives sustaining power through prayer, Bible study, worship, confession of sin, and other spiritual disciplines.

Key Concept: Jesus came to give eternal life to all who believe in and worship Him.

Notes

How might your life evidence spiritual dryness and thirst, and how can you address that thirst?



HANDS: The people we encounter each week need to know about the salvation offered by Jesus. They experience confusion, brokenness, and the need for forgiveness. Think of a friend or family member with whom you could share about Jesus. Pray for that person and set up a time to meet for conversation. Tell them about the spiritual satisfaction Jesus's living water offers.

How can you encourage other believers to share regularly the good news of Jesus Christ?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Thinking about your own potential water-cooler conversations, prepare a request or question you may intentionally ask someone else to signal your willingness to delve into spiritual talk.
- Social media provides a unique platform for taking a conversation into spiritual depths. Ask yourself how you might use social media as a way of starting spiritual dialogues.
- Make a list of the people you typically avoid talking with about spiritual matters and prayerfully commit to crossing that barrier by asking God to help you identify a specific opportunity.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 127 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 42:1-2 with your group, addressing your desire for the Lord and how only He satisfies.

WHY WE CAN TRUST THE RESURRECTION

By Bob Bunn



Within hours, myths surrounding the resurrection of Jesus began circulating on the first Easter morning. In his Gospel, Matthew explained that the religious leaders in Jerusalem made a deal with the Romans to cover up the empty tomb. As a result, the story of a stolen body gained traction among skeptics (Matt. 28:11-15).

A MAJOR MYTH

More than two thousand years later, doubters still embrace this myth, even though no one had a good reason to steal the body of Jesus. Few Romans would have wanted to nurture a story about Jesus's resurrection. If anything, they would have tamped down any messianic fervor a resurrection story could ignite. Likewise, the Jewish leaders understood that Jesus's resurrection would threaten their authority and their own messianic interpretations.

Of course, the disciples were blamed for the stolen body, but even they didn't have a good reason for robbing Jesus's grave. In fact, they seemed more surprised than anyone by reports of an empty tomb, even though Jesus had foretold it on multiple occasions. Plus, they never would have risked their lives to overpower trained Roman soldiers.

OTHER MYTHS

So, the "stolen body" theory really holds no water. In fact, none of the so-called "arguments" against the resurrection stand up to scrutiny. While trying to paint the Easter story as a myth, these "explanations" become myths in themselves:

1. The Swoon Theory: Jesus just passed out on the cross and revived in the cool air of the tomb. Of course, this completely ignores

the soldier who thrust his spear into Jesus's side to ensure He was dead. It also doesn't explain how a man who was recovering from torture and crucifixion managed to roll away the stone.

- 2. The Hypnosis Theory:** Everyone who saw Jesus was the victim of a mass hallucination, possibly a hypnotic suggestion planted by Jesus before His death. One would need to believe that hundreds of people would have fallen under the same spell across the course of six weeks. Then they'd have to explain how Saul of Tarsus saw and spoke to the risen Christ years after the Lord's return to heaven.
- 3. The Wrong Tomb Theory:** In their grief before the sun came up on Easter morning, the women simply visited the wrong tomb. But this idea has two major problems. First, John and Peter ran to the tomb after sunrise and found it exactly as the ladies described it. Second, the Romans could have pointed people to the correct tomb with Jesus's body still tucked away inside. This argument actually supports a resurrection.

BETTER EVIDENCE

In contrast to nonsensical explanations, two very important realities provide solid arguments in favor of Jesus's resurrection. The first is the abundance of eyewitness accounts. Since Jewish law discounted the testimony of women, no group trying to perpetuate a hoax would claim women as primary witnesses. But Christianity affirms the women's witness because we know the resurrection is true.

None of the so-called “arguments” against the resurrection stand up to scrutiny. While trying to paint the Easter story as a myth, these “explanations” become myths in themselves.

Plus, as mentioned, the women were not the only witnesses. Hundreds of people encountered the empty tomb and the resurrected Christ. From Peter and John on Easter morning to the travelers on the road to Emmaus on Easter evening to the apostle Paul outside Damascus, biblical history offers a plethora of testimonies regarding the risen Savior.

But for many, the greatest evidence of the resurrected Savior is the transformation seen in the lives of the disciples. Almost overnight, this band of cowards hiding in a locked room became an army of bold witnesses in the temple courtyards. The more their enemies turned up the heat, the more determined they became to share the gospel with as many people as possible.

Honestly, it’s hard to imagine them enduring persecution—and ultimately sacrificing their lives—for a hoax. If the resurrection were some kind of scam, they would have come clean as soon as the suffering hit. Yet they remained faithful to the end.

WHY IT MATTERS

The resurrection of Jesus is vital to us because it provides the backbone for our faith. In 1 Corinthians 15:12-19, the apostle Paul outlined a spiritual domino effect that topples everything we hold dear if the resurrection isn’t true. If resurrection is impossible, then Jesus wasn’t raised. If Jesus wasn’t raised, then the gospel is a fraud. If the gospel is a fraud, then our faith—and our eternal hope—is worthless.

If our faith is worthless, we are the most pitiful people on the face of the earth. We could be out doing whatever we wanted with no guilt or consequences instead of following the teachings of a

dead man. Nothing would really matter because Jesus isn’t really alive and will never really come back either to judge us or reward us.

Our hope remains secure.
And no amount
of skepticism or
philosophical theories
can change that.

But Paul put the brakes on the dominoes with one simple statement of faith: “As it is, Christ has been raised from the dead” (1 Cor. 15:20). As a result, we know that He is alive. Our faith is not in vain. Our hope remains secure. And no amount of skepticism or philosophical theories can change that. He is risen indeed!

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THE DISCIPLINE OF HUMBLE FAITH

By Rachel Myrick



This side of the cross, in our daily Bible readings, we enjoy the blessing of reading God's promises in the Old Testament and seeing their fulfillment in Jesus in the New Testament. Yet the people who encountered Jesus did not have the benefit of seeing the whole picture. They experienced the wonder and the glory, but they reacted with humble faith. Many times they didn't know what God was doing but trusted their salvation to Him. Here are a few things we can learn from those who devoted their lives to God's plan in humble faith.

TRUST GOD IN THE UNEXPECTED

Humble faith includes recognizing God is in control of all circumstances, even the unexpected challenges we face. Mary and Joseph were an ordinary engaged couple when the angel Gabriel appeared and changed their plans: Mary would become pregnant with the Son of God through the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26-38). Neither Joseph nor Mary knew what raising the Savior would entail, but they believed God had the power to do the impossible and trusted that He would help them along the way, even into the unknown. In each vignette in Luke's Gospel, from the shepherds that arrived at Jesus's birth to finding the twelve-year-old Christ at the temple, we see that humble faith does not mean waiting to obey until we have all the answers. Mary and Joseph showed faithful commitment to raise Jesus in fulfillment of the law while leaning on God to direct them. We too can trust God when it comes to raising our children, facing job loss, navigating health issues, or helping the needy in our community, even when we do not know what is coming next. Trusting God in every situation feels easier, though, when we remember that God works all things out for our good (Rom. 8:28).

LET GO OF EGO

If anyone had a reason to boast, it was John the Baptist. Even Jesus said there was no one born of woman who was greater than John (Matt. 11:11), and then Jesus added, "but the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." John humbly pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29-30), did not try to stop his disciples when they left to follow Jesus (vv. 35-37), and said that his joy was complete in watching Jesus's ministry unfold in all its glory (3:29). The Lord is pleased when we do kingdom work, whether that is sharing the gospel with others or teaching a small group. But remember that Jesus said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be last and servant of all" (Mark 9:35). Humble faith means committing to serving God and others, even if the Lord is the only One who notices. Our joy is complete in His glory, not ours.

POINT OTHERS TO CHRIST

Many times we shy away from evangelizing because we feel like we don't know how. The first disciples, however, eagerly brought others to Jesus before they really understood His mission. Andrew told his brother, Peter, "We have found the Messiah!" (John 1:41), and Philip told Nathanael, "Come and see!" (v. 46). They didn't know all that following Jesus would entail, but they devoted three years to following Him and preaching about God's kingdom. After Jesus's resurrection, the Holy Spirit led them to share the gospel everywhere they went, until each one of them was martyred or exiled. With the Holy Spirit's guidance and our humble submission to do His will, we too can point others to come and see the Savior of the world, trusting in Jesus to reconcile sinners to God (2 Cor. 5:20).

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UNIT 19 • SESSION 3

THE VISIT

CORE PASSAGE: MATTHEW 2:1-12

Context: Mary and Joseph experienced much in the years surrounding Jesus's birth. An angel gave each of them a message concerning God's Son being conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26-38; Matt. 1:18-25). A Roman census sent them traveling to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born and visited by shepherds. And at the temple in Jerusalem, they were amazed at Simeon's and Anna's reactions to their infant Son (Luke 2:25-38). Some time later, still in Bethlehem, they received yet more visitors—this time wise men from a pagan land looking for the promised King.

Key Concept: Jesus is the true King and worthy to be worshiped.

DAILY READINGS

- Day 1: Matthew 2:1-6
- Day 2: Matthew 2:7-12
- Day 3: Matthew 2:13-15
- Day 4: Matthew 2:16-18
- Day 5: Matthew 2:19-23
- Day 6: Psalm 47

Jesus came from humble means to be our humble King (Matthew 21:6).



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

¹ After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him."³ When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem of Judea," they told him, "because this is what was written by the prophet: ⁶ And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

Two Kings in Opposition

The Gospel of Matthew opens not with fireworks but with a genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17)—firmly rooting Jesus in God's divine promises to Israel. Yet when we arrive at Matthew 2:1-6, the veil of ordinary surroundings is still intact. There was no throne, no crown, no royal parade for the newborn Messiah. Still, in these verses, Matthew made a seismic claim: the true King was born—not merely a ruler of Israel but the long-promised King who was worthy of worship.

This King of kings came in obscurity, humility, and vulnerability. Yet His arrival was no less authoritative, no less royal. His birth carried divine weight, disoriented worldly power, and fulfilled ancient prophecy. Jesus came into humble circumstances to be our humble King—a truth that demands a response. Knowing Jesus as King will either stir worship or



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THE SON HAS COME

The eternal Son of God entered history with humble beginnings as a baby but fulfilled prophecies from Old Testament writers. He came as fully God and fully man to grow in wisdom and stature. He was baptized and tempted but never sinned because He was the spotless Lamb of God we needed to take away the sins of the world. Loved by some and hated by others, Jesus disrupted the religious standards of the day to usher forth the kingdom of God to bring salvation to all nations. He truly is greater than us, for He is the Son of Man and the Son of God, our Savior.

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