

07 THE SON HAS COME

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE


the **GOSPEL**PROJECT.

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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.

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SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

The Gospel Project for Adults aspires to point people 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 understand the storyline of Scripture and to see the thread from the beginning to the end that weaves through it all—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 and helping doubters become believers who become declarers of the gospel.

GOSPEL MISSION

Our desire is to encourage 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.

3 YEAR PLAN

**VOL 01:
CREATION AND COVENANT**

(Genesis; Job)
Fall 2024

**VOL 02:
LAW AND LIFE**

(Exodus–Deuteronomy)
Winter 2024–25

**VOL 03:
LAND AND LOSS**

(Joshua–1 Samuel)
Spring 2025

**VOL 04:
FOOLISHNESS AND WISDOM**

(1 Samuel–1 Kings; Wisdom Literature)
Summer 2025

**VOL 05:
DIVISION AND DEFIANCE**

(1 Kings–2 Chronicles; The Prophets)
Fall 2025

**VOL 06:
PROPHETS AND PROVISION**

(The Prophets; Ezra–Esther)
Winter 2025–26

**VOL 07:
THE SON HAS COME**

(The Gospels)
Spring 2026

**VOL 08:
THE SON HAS AUTHORITY**

(The Gospels)
Summer 2026

**VOL 09:
THE SON HAS TRUTH**

(The Gospels)
Fall 2026

**VOL 10:
THE SON HAS RISEN**

(The Gospels; Acts)
Winter 2026–27

**VOL 11:
THE CHURCH HAS A MISSION**

(Acts; The Epistles)
Spring 2027

**VOL 12:
THE CHURCH HAS A FUTURE**

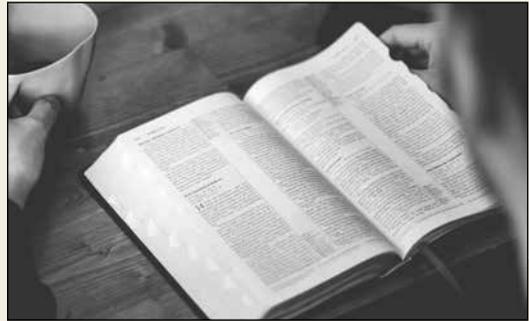
(The Epistles; Revelation)
Summer 2027

HOW TO USE THE PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

The Personal Study Guide is a vital 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

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

<input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: Luke 2:21-24	<input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: Luke 2:36-38
<input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: Luke 2:25-32	<input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: Luke 2:39-40
<input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: Luke 2:33-35	<input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 27



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

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2) STUDY THE PERSONAL PREPARATION

The Personal Preparation section contains the Scripture passages you will examine and discuss with your Bible study group. As you read each Scripture passage, a Bible study prompt will help you highlight, underline, or jot notes to help you engage with the Scripture and to provoke discussion with your group on the following Sunday. A brief commentary with thought-provoking questions will help you dig deeper into the text and reflect on what the text teaches you about God and yourself. You have the full week to work on your personal preparation, so whether you prefer to break it up into parts or do it all in one day, the flexibility is there for your schedule.

- Scripture
- Commentary
- Questions

PERSONAL PREPARATION

LUKE 2:25-35

JESUS CAME TO BRING SALVATION TO JEWS AND GENTILES, BUT AT A COST.

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."

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

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.

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?

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 (v. 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.

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" (Isaiah 53:5).

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

28 Unit 19 | Session 2 | The Dedication 29

3) PARTICIPATE IN THE GROUP EXPERIENCE

The Group Experience for each session includes an activity and interactive questions designed to make the most of your group experience. Depending on your leader, he or she may have you do the activity on your own before doing it together as a group, or your leader may want you to wait until group time. Either way, the personal prep you've 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 group time.

GROUP EXPERIENCE

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		

How might Simeon's and Anna's testimonies about the infant Jesus have encouraged Mary and Joseph?

How can we follow in the faithful and obedient steps of Simeon and Anna?

32 Unit 19 | Session 2 | The Dedication



- **Group Activity**
- **Interactive Questions**
- **Theological Applications**

4) TAKE THE NEXT STEPS

At the conclusion of your group time, consider how to apply the day's Scripture lesson by walking through the Head, Heart, and Hands application questions. Share and discuss answers to the questions for the mutual benefit of everyone in the group. Then take time in your group, and during the week after, to read and pray through the designated psalm, focusing your thoughts and words once more upon God's Word. And finally, record 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.

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

HEAD
What are some things we can do to help us patiently wait on the Lord?

HEART
How does the gift of Jesus for our salvation address the distractions and discouragement in your heart?

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE
Read and pray through Psalm 27. Thank the Lord for the gift of Jesus—our light and our salvation (v. 1). Pray for boldness to share the gospel of Jesus in the world (vv. 2-3). And finally, pray for patience to wait on the Lord for the fulfillment of all His promises (vv. 13-14).

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

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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 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" (Matthew 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.



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

- Day 1:** Matthew 1:1-17
- Day 2:** Matthew 1:18-25
- Day 3:** Luke 2:1-7
- Day 4:** Luke 2:8-14
- Day 5:** Luke 2:15-20
- Day 6:** Psalm 132



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

PERSONAL PREPARATION

LUKE 2:4-12

FROM THE LINE OF DAVID, AS PROPHESED, A SAVIOR WAS BORN.

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.”

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.

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” (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 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?

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.

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.”¹

–Takatemjen

PERSONAL PREPARATION

LUKE 2:13-20

HEARING THE GOOD NEWS, WE RESPOND, SHARE IT WITH OTHERS, AND PRAISE GOD.

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.



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

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.

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.

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.

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.

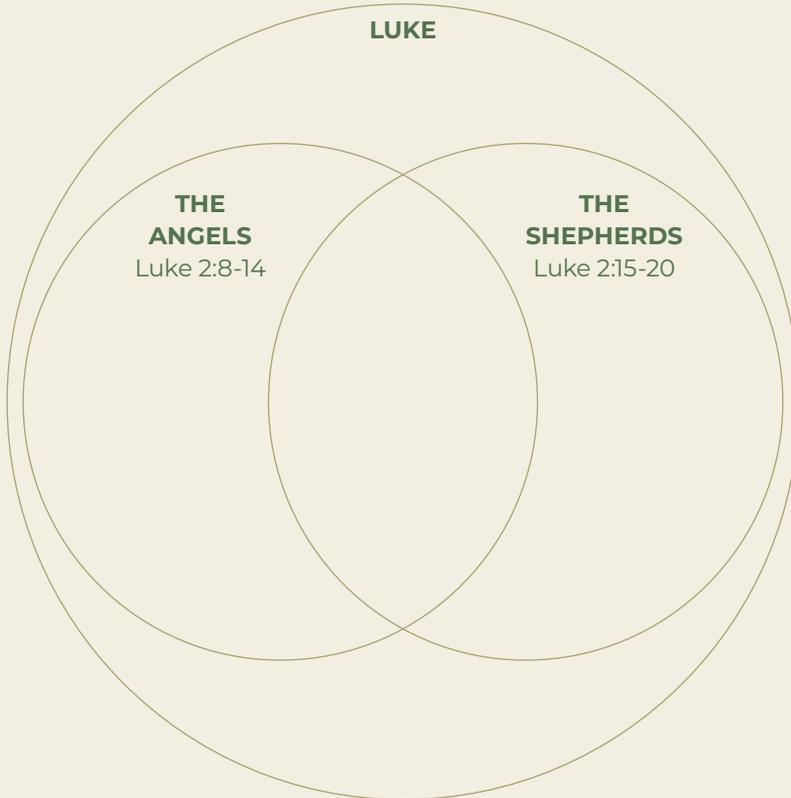
If we have received the gospel by faith, what should our following responsive actions be?

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.

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.



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?

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



HEAD

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read through Psalm 132. Thank God for keeping His word in sending His Anointed One to save His people (vv. 10-12), and praise the Lord with joy for the gift of righteousness we receive through faith in Jesus (vv. 9,16).



HEART

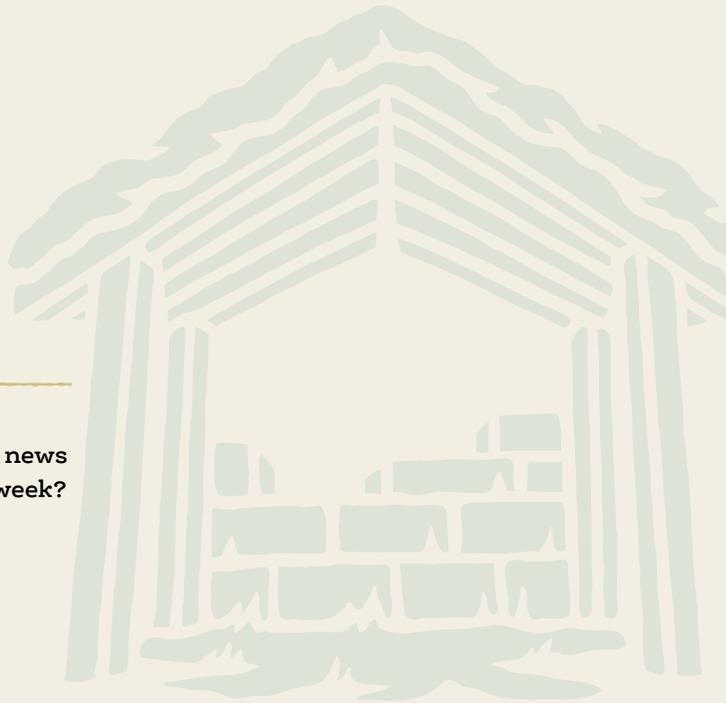
How can we love others, both inside and outside the church, who seem lowly by worldly standards?

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HANDS

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



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 (Hebrews 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 (Hebrews 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.

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" (Hebrews 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).

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" (Colossians 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.

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 (Exodus 13:1-2,11-15), and every woman was to present a sacrifice in the temple a certain number of days after childbirth (Leviticus 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.

PERSONAL PREPARATION

LUKE 2:25-35

JESUS CAME TO BRING SALVATION TO JEWS AND GENTILES, BUT AT A COST.

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."

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

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.

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?

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 (v. 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.

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" (Isaiah 53:5).

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

PERSONAL PREPARATION

LUKE 2:36-38

SERVING GOD MEANS RECOGNIZING JESUS AS GOD'S PROMISED REDEEMER.

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.

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)

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



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.

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.

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).

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.

GROUP EXPERIENCE



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		

How might Simeon's and Anna's testimonies about the infant Jesus have encouraged Mary and Joseph?

How can we follow in the faithful and obedient steps of Simeon and Anna?



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



HEAD

What are some things we can do to help us patiently wait on the Lord?

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read and pray through Psalm 27. Thank the Lord for the gift of Jesus—our light and our salvation (v. 1). Pray for boldness to share the gospel of Jesus in the world (vv. 2-3). And finally, pray for patience to wait on the Lord for the fulfillment of all His promises (vv. 13-14).



HEART

How does the gift of Jesus for our salvation address the distractions and discouragement in your heart?

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HANDS

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



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; Matthew 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

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: Matthew 2:1-6 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: Matthew 2:16-18 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: Matthew 2:7-12 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: Matthew 2:19-23 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: Matthew 2:13-15 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 47 |



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

PERSONAL PREPARATION

MATTHEW 2:1-6

JESUS CAME FROM HUMBLE MEANS TO BE OUR HUMBLE KING.

*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."

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.

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

In much the same way the shepherds immediately went to find baby Jesus after the angels' 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.

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" (Micah 5:2,4).

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



PERSONAL PREPARATION

MATTHEW 2:7-12

THE RESULT OF KNOWING JESUS IS JOYFUL WORSHIP.

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.

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

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.

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

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.

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

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.

LINKING THE PROPHECIES

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

THE WISE MEN

Matthew 2:1-2,11

Isaiah 60:1-6

THE STAR

Matthew 2:2,7,9-10

Numbers 24:15-19

BETHLEHEM

Matthew 2:1-8

Micah 5:1-6

RULER/SHEPHERD

Matthew 2:1-8

Ezekiel 34:15-24

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

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



HEAD

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read and pray through Psalm 47. Praise Jesus as the King over the whole earth because of His protection (v. 3), His providence (v. 4), His justice and His salvation for the whole world (vv. 5-9).

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HEART

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



HANDS

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



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
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Scripture passages.

PERSONAL PREPARATION

LUKE 2:40-47

JESUS GREW UP LIKE ALL OTHER HUMANS YET DISPLAYED AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORD OF GOD.

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.

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 (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; Micah 5:3), but the New Testament also affirms that Jesus's earthly life bore all the marks of being a human. He experienced the circumstances common to living as a human being, such as hunger (Matthew 4:2), thirst (John 19:28), weariness (Matthew 8:24), sorrow (John 11:35), and pain (the crucifixion).

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

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 (Matthew 2:1-12), after which He spent some time in Egypt before returning to the family's hometown in Nazareth (Matthew 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).

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.

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.

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



PERSONAL PREPARATION

LUKE 2:48-52

JESUS ACKNOWLEDGED GOD AS HIS FATHER.

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.

GOSPEL CONNECTION

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.

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



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.

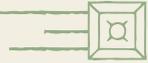
In what ways are you acknowledging God as your heavenly Father and your highest authority?

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.

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?



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

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



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



HEAD

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read and pray through Psalm 122. Pray that you will rejoice to come to Jesus with fellow churchgoers in His house. Ask God to give you a hunger for His Word and His will that you may grow in knowledge.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HEART

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



HANDS

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



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.

PERSONAL PREPARATION

MATTHEW 3:1-6

CONFESSION, REPENTANCE, AND BAPTISM ARE PART OF A BELIEVER'S JOURNEY.

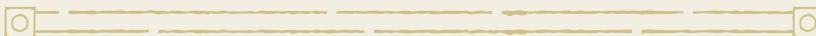
Circle the ways people demonstrated their repentance in this passage.

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.

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."¹

—R. C. Sproul (1939–2017)



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 yet rich in meaning and context: "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. 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).

GOSPEL CONNECTION

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

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?

PERSONAL PREPARATION

MATTHEW 3:7-12

THOSE WHO TRUST IN JESUS WILL BE GIVEN THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Underline words or phrases that underscore the seriousness of John the Baptist's message.

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.”

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.



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.

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.

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



GROUP EXPERIENCE



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



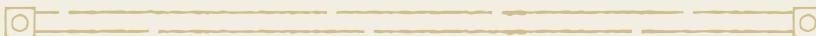
MATTHEW 3:12



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



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



HEAD

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read and pray through Psalm 139. Reflect on all the grace and care the Lord has shown you throughout your life. Then pray for God's insight into all the ways you need to repent and obey Him.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HEART

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



HANDS

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



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 4: John 1:1-18

Day 2: Luke 3:21-38

Day 5: John 1:19-34

Day 3: Matthew 3:13-17

Day 6: Psalm 146



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

PERSONAL PREPARATION

MATTHEW 3:13-15

JESUS SET AN EXAMPLE FOR US IN BAPTISM.

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.

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

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

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.

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?

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 (v. 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.

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

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.

PERSONAL PREPARATION

MATTHEW 3:16-17

JESUS'S BAPTISM DISPLAYS THE TRIUNE GOD.

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."

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

GOD IS ONE IN THREE PERSONS: While the Bible affirms that God is one (Mark 12:29; 1 Corinthians 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 (Philippians 2), the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4)—and each Person is distinct from the others (Matthew 11:27; John 10:30; 14:16). This perfect unity within the three Persons of the Trinity is a first-order doctrine.

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



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.

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.

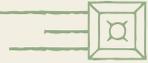
Why is it significant that all three Persons of the Trinity were active at Jesus’s baptism?

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.





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

How did Jesus humble Himself in this scene?

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



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



HEAD

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read and pray through Psalm 146, noting all of the Lord's works, many found in the ministry of Jesus. Praise God for how He loves and saves those in need, those who put their hope in the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 5).

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HEART

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



HANDS

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



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.

PERSONAL PREPARATION

LUKE 4:1-4

WE ARE EASILY TEMPTED WHEN OUR NEEDS ARE UNMET, BUT WE CAN RESIST.

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.”

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 (Matthew 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 (Matthew 26:41), and we pray for God to deliver us from evil (Matthew 6:13).

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

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.

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. Deuteronomy 8:3).

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.



PERSONAL PREPARATION

LUKE 4:5-13

TRUSTING GOD AND RELYING ON HIS WORD CAN HELP US RESIST TEMPTATION.

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.

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.

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

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.

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?

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.

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?

GROUP EXPERIENCE

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

How does Scripture help us to resist temptation?

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

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



HEAD

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read and pray through Psalm 141 with a posture of relying on God in your battle against temptation and sin. Acknowledge His sanctifying work in your life, and request His protection from temptation and the Spirit's conviction for sin in your life.



HEART

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

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HANDS

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



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.

PERSONAL PREPARATION

JOHN 1:35-37,40-44

JESUS, THE LAMB OF GOD AND THE MESSIAH, IS WORTHY TO BE FOLLOWED.

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.

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 Timothy 1:8-10).

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



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.

How does the title "the Lamb of God" point to Jesus's purpose?

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.

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



PERSONAL PREPARATION

JOHN 1:45-51

JESUS, THE SON OF GOD AND THE KING OF ISRAEL, WILL REVEAL MANY THINGS TO HIS PEOPLE.

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."

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



“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.

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

This revelation prompted Nathanael’s confession: “You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!” (v. 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 Genesis 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).

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

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.

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.

GROUP EXPERIENCE



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

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?



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



HEAD

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Pray through Psalm 24. Praise Jesus for being the King of glory, the Son of God, and our Savior (vv. 7-10). Thank God that Jesus, whom we follow in faith, saves us and leads us into His holy presence (vv. 3-6).

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



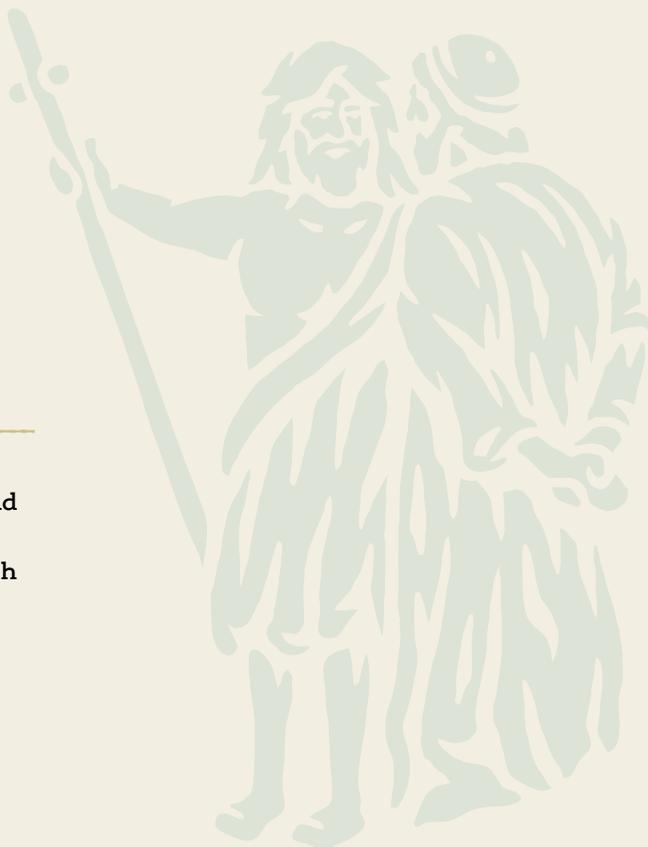
HEART

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



HANDS

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



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.

PERSONAL PREPARATION

JOHN 2:1-5

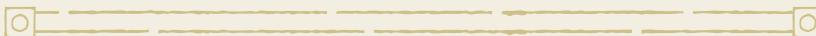
JESUS, BEING THE SAVIOR, CAME ULTIMATELY TO LAY HIS LIFE DOWN FOR OUR SINS.

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.

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.



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.

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.

"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.

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

PERSONAL PREPARATION

JOHN 2:6-11

JESUS, BEING GOD, IS ALL-POWERFUL AND CAN PERFORM MIRACLES.

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.

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.

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

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.

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?

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.

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



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



HEAD

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE



Read Psalm 104. Thank God for the mighty works He has done (vv. 1-30). Then commit to praising Jesus each day (v. 33), and ask Him to direct your thoughts to things that please Him (v. 34).

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HEART

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



HANDS

Who in need will you contact with encouragement this week?



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 (Matthew 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 (Matthew 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 (Matthew 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" (Isaiah 7:14). Paul acknowledged Mary in stating that Jesus

was “born of a woman” (Galatians 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’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 |



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

PERSONAL PREPARATION

JOHN 2:13-17

JESUS IS ZEALOUS ABOUT HOLINESS AND PURITY.

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.

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.



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.

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 Matthew 26:61; Mark 14:58).

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.

PERSONAL PREPARATION

JOHN 2:18-22

JESUS'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION WOULD PROVE HIS AUTHORITY.

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.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

RESURRECTION: Both the Old and New Testaments teach that one day believers will experience a resurrection of the body from the dead (Isaiah 26:19; Ezekiel 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 (Philippians 3:20-21; Romans 8:22-23). The hope of the future resurrection gives Christians confidence that death has been defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ.

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

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 Matthew 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.

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

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 (2:19-20). 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 (Hebrews 10:12).

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



GROUP EXPERIENCE



ESTABLISHING AUTHORITY

Compare the actions, words, scriptural basis, and sign demonstrated or alluded to by Jesus in these two passages.

JOHN 2:13-22

MATTHEW 12:1-14

ACTIONS

WORDS

**SCRIPTURAL
BASIS**

SIGN

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?



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



HEAD

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 69. Ask God to remove the sin in your life that dishonors Him (v. 6). Pray for increased zeal for His standards of holiness (v. 9). Thank God for offering you "faithful love" and "sure salvation" in Jesus (v. 13).

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HEART

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



HANDS

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



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

- Day 1:** John 3:1-2
- Day 2:** John 3:3-8
- Day 3:** John 3:9-13
- Day 4:** John 3:14-17
- Day 5:** John 3:18-21
- Day 6:** Psalm 18



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

PERSONAL PREPARATION

JOHN 3:5-8

WE ARE BORN AGAIN THROUGH THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

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.”

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.

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 (Ezekiel 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.

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.

How can you help others who don’t understand what it means to receive new spiritual life?

PERSONAL PREPARATION

JOHN 3:14-21

WE ARE GIVEN ETERNAL LIFE THROUGH BELIEVING IN JESUS CHRIST.

*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.”

GOSPEL CONNECTION

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.

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 (Numbers 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.

How would you explain what it means to believe in Jesus?

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 Corinthians 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.

How should our view of the condemnation facing nonbelievers affect our willingness to share the gospel with others?



GROUP EXPERIENCE



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		

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?



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



HEAD

How would you explain what it means to believe in Jesus and receive eternal life to someone like Nicodemus?

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 18. Thank God for saving you from the danger of sin (vv. 1-15). Express trust in the Lord as your “support” (v. 18) and rescuer (v. 19). Commit to praise Him regularly for your salvation (v. 49).

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HEART

How does your life give evidence that you’ve been transformed by the Holy Spirit?



HANDS

With whom will you talk about a life-changing relationship with Jesus?



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

- Day 1:** John 3:22-24
- Day 2:** John 3:25-26
- Day 3:** John 3:27-30
- Day 4:** John 3:31-34
- Day 5:** John 3:35-36
- Day 6:** Psalm 45



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

PERSONAL PREPARATION

JOHN 3:25-30

BELIEF IN CHRIST INVOLVES HUMBLING OURSELVES BEFORE HIM.

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."

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 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" (Isaiah 40:3).

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.

What does glorifying Jesus rather than yourself mean practically in your current season of life?



PERSONAL PREPARATION

JOHN 3:31-36

WE HUMBLE OURSELVES BECAUSE CHRIST IS SUPREME.

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.

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.

Key Concept: Belief involves acknowledging the supremacy of Jesus.



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.

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.

What are some common reasons people reject Jesus’s offer of eternal life?



MESSENGER OR MESSIAH?

Read John 3:25-36. Use the Venn diagram to compare Jesus's and John the Baptist's ministries.



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?

Key Concept: Belief involves acknowledging the supremacy of Jesus.



HEAD

How might a lack of knowledge about Jesus limit your ability to believe in Him?

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 45. Praise God for His majesty, splendor, and power (vv. 3-6). Ask Him to grant you joy and flourishing as you submit to His rule (vv. 7-12). Commit to exalt Jesus's name over your own (v. 17).

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HEART

In what ways should you commit to humble yourself before Jesus?



HANDS

How will you encourage someone this week to have a humble attitude before Christ?



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.

PERSONAL PREPARATION

JOHN 4:7-11,13-15

JESUS GIVES US LIVING WATER.

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.”

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.

Key Concept: Jesus came to give eternal life to all who believe in and worship Him.

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 Isaiah 55:1-2; Jeremiah 2:13; Zechariah 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.

With what groups of people do you feel reluctant to share the gospel? Why?

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’” (Ecclesiastes 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” (Psalm 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).

How have you experienced the Holy Spirit’s spiritual refreshing in your life?



PERSONAL PREPARATION

JOHN 4:19-23,25-26

JESUS CLARIFIED WHAT WORSHIP IS AND THAT HE IS THE MESSIAH.

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.”

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.

Key Concept: Jesus came to give eternal life to all who believe in and worship Him.

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.

How does the health of our personal relationship with Jesus impact our ability to worship in Spirit and truth?

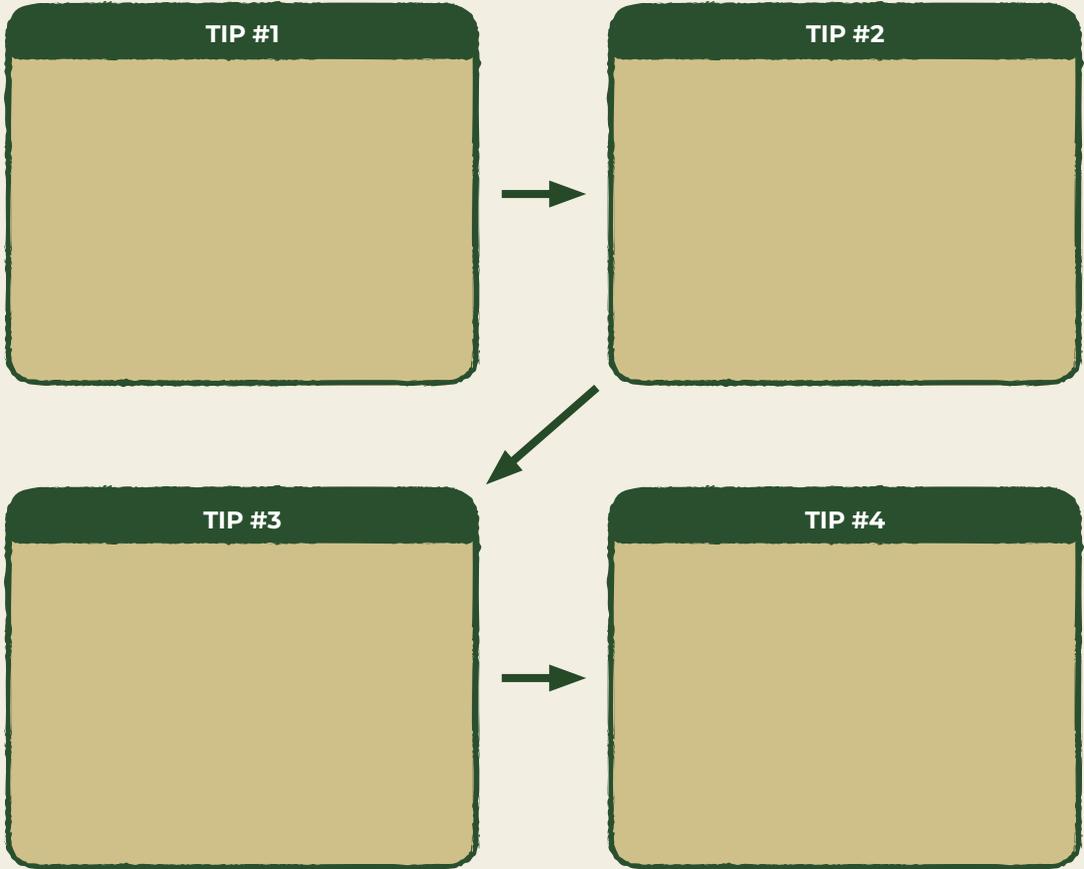
The woman realized Jesus's statements related to the coming Messiah, the One promised in the Old Testament who would remedy sin's curse. Samaritans expected the Messiah to be a teacher. He would be the prophet like Moses foretold in Deuteronomy who would "tell them everything" (Deuteronomy 18:18). Because 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.

How can you take the gospel to people who do not realize Jesus is the Messiah?

TALK AROUND THE WATER COOLER

Read John 4:7-26 and list how Jesus gave us an example to follow in having spiritual conversations.



What might keep us from turning common conversations into gospel sharing opportunities?

Key Concept: Jesus came to give eternal life to all who believe in and worship Him.



HEAD

What are some ways you can study about Jesus to know Him more deeply?

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 42. Express your soul's need for God (vv. 1-2). Tell Him reasons you feel sad or spiritually dry (vv. 3-5, 9-10). Ask God to comfort you with His love (v. 8). Recommit to follow Him (v. 11).

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HEART

How might your life evidence spiritual dryness and thirst, and how can you address that thirst?



HANDS

How can you encourage other believers to share regularly the good news of Jesus Christ?



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 (Matthew 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.

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.

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 Corinthians 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!

Bob Bunn serves as a content editor for the Adult Explore the Bible team at Lifeway. He and his wife, Mary, live in Nashville, Tennessee, and are long-time members of Nashville First Baptist Church.

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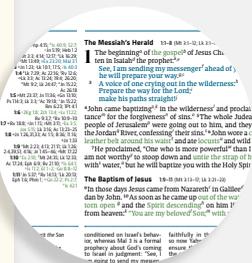
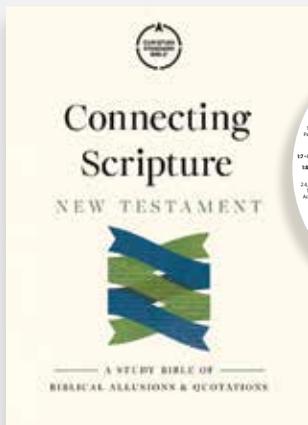
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