

The Birth Narratives

Luke 1:31–33

QUESTIONS

AGES 3–5

1. Where was Jesus born? *Bethlehem, the city of David.*
2. What did Gabriel tell Mary? *She would become the mother of the Messiah, the King.*
3. To whom did the angel announce Jesus' birth? *To shepherds.*
4. Did the shepherds believe? How do you know? *Yes. We know because they immediately obeyed. Then they told others and glorified God.*

AGES 6–8

1. Who was the king in Jerusalem? *Herod was king at the time in Jerusalem when the Magi came.*
2. Why does it matter who the rulers were? *It shows us that Jesus' birth is real history. It really happened. It also shows that Jesus, not rulers like Herod, is to be honored as the Savior and Prince of Peace.*
3. Was Jesus born in a nice place? *No. He was born in an animal shelter in a crowded, tiny town.*
4. Why was Jesus' birth announced to the shepherds? *To show that He came to save even the lowly, to show that He would be the chief Shepherd, and to show that He would be the sacrificial Lamb.*

AGES 9–11

1. What did the angels announce to the shepherds? *"For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*
2. What did the shepherds do after they found the baby Jesus? *They glorified and praised God.*
3. Who came from the east looking for the King who had been born? *The wisemen of the east, also called Magi.*
4. What did the Magi do when they found Jesus, and did they go back to Herod? *They gave gifts to Jesus and were warned in a dream not to return to Herod.*

INTRODUCE

AGES 3–5

SUNDAY SCHOOL CENSUS

Before the lesson, call up each child to take a “census” of your classroom. Ask each child to state his or her first and last names, siblings’ names, birthplace, month of birth, favorite color, etc. After all the children are registered, you might divide the class into groups based on the information you collected: boys on one side of the room, girls on the other; those with siblings here, those without there; January birthdays here, February birthdays there; etc. Use this activity to explain why Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem to be registered.

A VERY SPECIAL BIRTHDAY

Decorate the room with birthday-related items: streamers, party favors, wrapped gifts, birthday cake (or cupcakes), candles, etc. As the children arrive, ask them whose birthday it is. Tell the children that today we will learn about a very special birthday: the birth of Jesus.

HOW DO WE RECEIVE MESSAGES?

Ask the children if any of them have ever received a letter, phone call, or email. Talk about the different ways we receive messages today. Tell the children that in today’s story, Jesus’ parents received messages from some of God’s special messengers—angels.

ANGEL ON THE WALL

Draw an angel on a large piece of butcher paper, and tape it to a wall in the classroom. Explain that an angel had a very special message for Joseph while he was sleeping. During the Bible lesson, we will find out what that message was.

AGES 6–8

THE HUMILITY OF CHRISTMAS

Ask the children to describe Christmas and the birth of Jesus in just one word. While many words could be used to describe Christmas, one of the most fitting is the word “humility.” As a class, read Philippians 2:3–11 and identify the numerous ways Jesus humbled Himself when He left His throne in heaven to rescue His enemies on earth.

MEANINGFUL NAMES

Bring a baby name book to class. Use it to look up the children’s names and share the meanings with the class. Then ask the children if any of them know what the name of Jesus means. Give them a hint: the meaning is found in Matthew 1:21 (“Savior”). Tell the children that in today’s lesson, we will learn about the Savior who was born to save people like us.

ANCESTORS AND DESCENDANTS

Teach the meaning of ancestors and descendants to your children. Bring in pictures of your grandparents, parents, and children. Show these pictures to the children, and tell them who each person is. Tell them that you are your father’s son or daughter and that you are your grandparents’

grandson or granddaughter. Teach them that ancestors are the grandmothers and grandfathers all the way back to Noah. Do the reverse for “descendant.” Tell the children that they are descendants of their grandparents. They are descendants of their grandma’s grandma and so on. In the end, use the pictures to test the children to see if they know who is an ancestor and who is a descendant. In today’s lesson, we are going to learn that Joseph and Jesus were descendants of King David.

AGES 9–11

GOD IS BORN

Help the children understand what a unique and incomprehensible event Jesus’ incarnation was. Begin by reminding the children of God’s incommunicable characteristics (those characteristics that only God has), such as His eternality, omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. As God the Son, Christ has all these characteristics. However, when He came to earth as a man, He laid aside the independent exercise of some of them, though He still was fully God. This is something that our finite minds cannot fully comprehend. Understanding this should cause us to praise Him for who He is and what He has done.

IT REALLY HAPPENED

Share some unusual facts that seem too bizarre to be true with the children before the lesson. Use this activity to begin a discussion about the birth of Jesus. While some might say that Jesus’ birth is too strange to be true, we can be confident that it really happened. In our lesson today, we’re going to see that Jesus came as a real child into our real world to save real people like us.

THE NEED FOR A SAVIOR

Ask the children what life would be like without sin. Remind the children that God created Adam and Eve in a perfect garden. After sin entered the world, man’s punishment was death. God loved us and promised to send His only Son to die on the cross for our sins. God sent Jesus as a gift for us. That gift is our salvation.

ILLUSTRATE

AGES 3–5

FROM THE EYES OF A SHEPHERD

Tell the story from the perspective of one of the shepherds to whom the angel spoke. Dress like a shepherd and bring in various items to help illustrate the story: a clipboard and pencil (census), stuffed donkey, stuffed sheep, manger, baby boy doll, shepherd’s staff, etc.

THE LAMB OF GOD

Tell the children that many of the sheep the shepherds in our story watched over were used as temple sacrifices. Explain that these sacrifices for sin were offered year after year in the temple, but their blood could never pay the penalty for the people's sin. Like the sheep, Jesus came to give His life as a sacrifice for sin. The Bible even calls Jesus the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29). However, unlike the sheep, God accepted Jesus' sacrifice as payment for sin. Now all who trust in Jesus have their sins forgiven. You may illustrate this by giving the children a dark colored dot sticker (sin) to place on a stuffed lamb (Jesus). Tell the children that Jesus is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

THRONE OF DAVID

Bring in a picture of a throne or construct a pretend throne (elevate a chair and create a high back with cardboard tubes painted gold). Explain that when the Bible talks about a throne, it is talking about a King who sits on a throne. Tell the children that Gabriel told Mary that God would give her a Son, Jesus, "the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:32). Explain that this meant that Jesus would rule as King forever. God was going to give Jesus David's throne.

JOSEPH OBEYED

The angel told Joseph to take Mary as his wife (Matt 1:20). Did Joseph obey the angel? Yes! (v24). The angel also told Joseph to name the baby that was in Mary, "Jesus" (v21). Did Joseph obey the angel? Yes! (v25). Explain that because Joseph obeyed the angel, he showed that he believed what the angel said. The same is true for us. When our moms and dads tell us something, we show that we believe them by obeying what they say.

AGES 6-8

ACT IT OUT

Today's lesson will be very familiar to most children. They have likely heard it taught each year at Christmas time and will know the basic storyline. Assign the children roles in the Christmas story the week before. You may also want to give them short lines to learn during the week. Ask them to bring in a costume to wear during the play. The story can then be acted out during the lesson time.

BORN TO DIE

Bring in various plans: a blueprint, a sports playbook, a set of directions, an itinerary, a program, etc. Use these to show that it was always God's plan that His Son would die as a sacrifice for sin (Acts 2:22-23; 2 Tim 1:9; Rev 13:8).

MIRACULOUS BIRTH

Tell the children that the birth of Jesus was a miracle. Explain that Jesus' birth was a miracle because it didn't happen according to the natural pattern that God established. Normally, every child has a mother and a father, but Jesus had an earthly mother and no earthly father. This is why Jesus' birth was a miracle. Ask the children if they can remember any other miraculous births that we've

learned about in the book of Genesis? One is the birth of Isaac in Genesis 21:1 (his mother, Sarah, was too old to have children and barren), and another is the birth of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25:21–26 (their mother, Rebekah, was barren).

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Tell the children that the angel told Joseph to name the Child that Mary was carrying, “Jesus” (Matt 1:21). This name means “Joshua” or “the Lord saves”. Ask the children if they remember any other names given to Jesus in the previous three Christmas lessons. Answers include: “Messiah”, “Savior”, “Christ”, “King”, and “Immanuel”. Ask the children if they can remember what any of these names tells us about Jesus.

AGES 9–11

AN AMAZING INSTRUCTION

The angel gave the shepherds an unusual instruction, but they obeyed and were blessed. To illustrate this, give a child an unusual instruction. It could be something like, “Look in the piano bench” (where you have hidden some candy). Did the child follow your instructions? The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem to see the child of whom the angel spoke.

PEACE WITH GOD

Show the children a picture of a traditional peace sign as made popular in America during the 1960s and 1970s. Ask them if they know what this means. Explain that this kind of peace—the absence of war among mankind—is not the type of peace this verse is talking about. Nor is it talking about an internal sense of calm or tranquility. It describes the ending of the sinner’s war with God (Rom 5:10) and is a result of the justification we receive by faith (Rom 5:1; Col 1:21–22).

BABY ACROSTIC

Write the acrostic “BABY” vertically on the board. Above the acrostic write, “Mary, you will...” As you teach the section on Luke 1:26–33, fill in the summary of what the angel told Mary about the baby she would soon bear. Use this acrostic to help the children remember the important things the angel revealed to Mary about her son, Jesus. Mary, you will... **B**ear a son, and call his name Jesus; He will... **B**e great and be called the Son of the Most High; **Y**our son will rule the Messianic Kingdom.

BLESSINGS OF OBEDIENCE

Mary was likely a young girl (probably around the age of thirteen) when she learned she would be the mother of Jesus. This came as a shock, as Mary had never been married. However, the Bible records her amazing response: “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Mary believed and submitted herself to God’s will. Because of her submission, she was greatly blessed (Luke 1:21). We, too, receive God’s blessing when we obey His will.