

Session 2

BIRTH OF THE KING

Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-7

Memory Verse

“See, I am the Lord’s servant,” said Mary. “May it happen to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.

– LUKE 1:38, CSB



Birth of the King

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Jesus, the Messiah, was born in Bethlehem, fulfilling Old Testament prophecy and humbly entering the world as a part of God's plan for our salvation.

CALL TO ACTION: Who do you know in your life who is hoping in him or herself? Who do you know who is relying on a human, or human thought, to bring fulfillment? Seek an opportunity to share with them how their (our!) only hope is outside of us—on Another whom God has sent.

Birth stories are some of the most treasured memories people share. Many parents love to reminisce about the day their child was born. It's often exciting, nerve-racking, and joyful . . . sometimes with humorous details mixed in. These experiences often become a special part of our family history, retold on birthdays for years to come.

We celebrate and cherish new life coming into the world. It's the start of something new, and a hopeful future for someone so dearly loved.

Today, we'll study the most important birth in history: the birth of Jesus. Many read this every year around Christmas time, but today we're going to dig a bit deeper to look at some specific details of the humble birth of the King of kings.



Let's talk birth stories! Any parents want to share the birth story of any of their children?

 Was anyone born under miraculous or funny circumstances?
Share as is appropriate.

Session Summary

Today we are studying the two gospel accounts of Jesus's birth (Luke and Matthew). Luke emphasized Jesus's mother Mary's extraordinary faith in God and His plan, reminding us that God often works through people the world might overlook.

Matthew's account of Jesus's birth emphasized that Jesus was the promised Messiah, fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. Matthew focused on Joseph, who showed compassion toward Mary and then faithfully obeyed God's direction delivered by the angel in his dream. Together, Joseph and Mary trusted God's plan, and through their obedience, the Savior entered the world.

God's sovereignty continued to be on display in Luke's account of Jesus's birth. God used a Roman census to bring Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, fulfilling the prophesied birthplace of the Messiah. There, Jesus entered the world in ultimate humility, and we see God's plan for salvation further unfold with intention and purpose.

1. Gabriel Predicts Jesus's Birth (Luke 1:26-38)

 What do we learn about Mary's character in this passage?

 How do we see Mary's faith displayed?

The account of Jesus's birth is recorded in two of the four Gospels: Matthew and Luke. Today we are going to look at a portion of both accounts, starting with Luke's account.

The book of Luke contains more stories of women than any other gospel account.¹ In his writings on Jesus's birth, Luke included further context around the story of Jesus's

mother, Mary. Just before this passage, Luke recorded the account of another miraculous pregnancy, that of Elizabeth's (Mary's cousin). Elizabeth, the wife of the priest Zechariah, had been infertile but God selected her to carry John the Baptist. The note of "sixth month" in verse 26 refers to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

God sent Gabriel (one of few named angels in Scripture) to speak to Mary. Gabriel is the same angel who delivered news of Elizabeth's pregnancy to Zechariah, and is also the angel God sent to visit the prophet Daniel to explain Daniel's visions in the Old Testament. The mention of Nazareth, a small village in Galilee points to Mary's humble beginnings. She and Joseph weren't wealthy (later, when they present Jesus at the temple, they will present the sacrifice God prescribed for the poor, Luke 2:24). Once again, we see God working outside of human and societal expectations. He didn't pick someone rich and prominently placed to carry Jesus. He picked a humble, faithful woman. God often works through people humans see as unlikely choices.

Luke noted that Mary was a virgin, harkening back to the words of Isaiah: "Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14) As we discussed last week, the Messiah was prophesied to come from the line of David, which Luke specified Joseph was from.

Gabriel called Mary a "favored woman," saying, "The Lord is with you" (v. 28). When Mary was troubled by Gabriel's appearance and greeting (as any of us would be), Gabriel told her not to be afraid. He told Zechariah the same thing when Zechariah was "terrified and overcome with fear" (Luke 1:12) at Gabriel's appearance. Gabriel reassured Mary that she had "found favor with God" (v. 30) and explained what would take place. Even though she was a virgin, Mary would become pregnant and give birth to Jesus. When Gabriel said Jesus would be "the Son of the Most High" (v. 32), he was proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God who would reign forever over the house of Israel.

Mary responded naturally from a place of curiosity (this shouldn't physically be possible—how could this be?). What an interesting contrast she made to Zechariah in a very similar position. When Gabriel delivered the news of Elizabeth's upcoming pregnancy to Zechariah, he responded from a place

of unbelief (his wife was well past child-bearing years).² Zechariah's unbelief resulted in temporary consequences (he was mute until John was born), but Mary's question received an answer: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you" (v. 35). Mary would conceive thanks to the power of the Holy Spirit. "For nothing will be impossible with God" (v. 37).

Note Mary's humble acceptance of this proclamation. It was an honor, yes, but that wouldn't make it easy in everyday life. This took an immense amount of trust on Mary's part. What would her betrothed think? By law, Joseph could have had Mary stoned for perceived adultery when he found out she was pregnant even though she was legally (and bindingly) betrothed to him. He could break off the engagement (which was Joseph's plan before God intervened), putting her in a very risky position. What would her family and friends and community think? They would know she should be a virgin and therefore should not be pregnant. They would also likely assume she had been unfaithful to Joseph. When Mary said yes, she knew to a degree the impact this would make on her life. This was a risky and scary step, but Mary took it with great faith.

We can learn much from Mary's example in this passage. This would have been well outside any plans she could have had for her upcoming marriage! But even so, Mary trusted that God knew what He was doing. Mary trusted God enough to say yes even when it was scary and uncertain. Even when she knew people would talk, Mary said yes. May we also be able to say, "may it happen to me as you have said" (v. 38) to God's plan for our lives.

 **Application:** How do you react when God's plan is very different from the one you have for yourself?

2. The Nativity of the Messiah (Matthew 1:18-25)

 What do we learn about Joseph's character in this passage?



What important information did Matthew include in his account compared to Luke's account of Mary?

In our study last week, we talked about how Matthew's included genealogy boldly affirmed Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. Today, we'll see how he built the same argument in his account of Jesus's birth.

Verse 18 gives us an overview of what we just studied in Luke. Mary "was pregnant from the Holy Spirit" (v. 18), and now we learn how Joseph reacted (remember, by law, Joseph could have had Mary stoned for perceived adultery when he found out she was pregnant even though she was legally and bindingly betrothed to him). Note the kindness in Joseph's plan. He did not want to "disgrace her publicly" (v. 19) and did not want to have her stoned, so he planned to resolve the matter in private.

God, however, intervened. An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, telling him not to be afraid to be married to Mary. He confirmed that Mary's pregnancy was a result of the Holy Spirit and said Jesus would "save his people from their sins" (v. 21). Matthew didn't want his readers to miss the fulfillment of prophecy. He called out that the circumstances of Jesus's birth fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy from Isaiah 7:14.

Joseph, righteous in character, obediently did what the angel of the Lord commanded. We've talked about the risk that Mary assumed by saying "yes" to God's plan for her life. Joseph assumed some risk, too. Joseph moving forward with the marriage wouldn't prevent the gossip and questions around Jesus's birth. But Joseph also stepped forward in faith. And so, Jesus was born to an obedient couple who displayed great faith.



Application: Where might you need to exercise faith in God in a situation where you may be misunderstood by others? What makes this challenging?

3. The Birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1-7)



What similarities do you notice between Matthew's account and Luke's account of Jesus's birth?



What differences? What details did Luke give that Matthew did not?

Matthew's account of Jesus's birth achieved his goal of providing evidence that Jesus was the Messiah, and Luke's account gives a little more color and details. Luke recorded the circumstances around the census ordered by Rome. Historians believe that Quirinius served as Rome's governor over Syria for two terms, from 6–4 BC, and from 6–9 AD. Scholars place Jesus as being born in the first term (though a census registration took place in his second term as well).³

“His own town” in verse 3 refers not to a person's hometown, but the town of their ancestral roots. Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth of Galilee, and for the census traveled to the city where David grew up, Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16:1). This location for Jesus's birth fulfilled this prophecy from Micah 5:2:

Bethlehem Ephrathah,
you are small among the clans of Judah;
one will come from you
to be ruler over Israel for me.
His origin is from antiquity,
from ancient times.

We can glean that Joseph and Mary were not yet married at this point (v. 5) and had not consummated their marriage. They were engaged and Mary, still a virgin, was close to giving birth. The trip to get to Bethlehem from Nazareth would've covered about ninety miles and taken three days⁴ (quite the undertaking for a very pregnant woman).

When they arrived in Bethlehem, there wasn't a guest room available for this poor, humble couple, so Mary gave birth in a stable and laid Jesus in a manger. This humble circumstance calls to mind Jesus's words later say in Matthew 11:29:

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Emphasis added)

There, in Bethlehem, in some of the most humble circumstances imaginable, the Prince of Peace, King of kings, our Lord and Savior was born (already breaking the mold on what the people expected of the Messiah). He wasn't the Messiah they were expecting, but He offered a gift better than any they could have imagined.



Application: How have you Jesus challenged your expectations of Him by arriving in unexpected places and ways?

Conclusion

Luke's account of Jesus's birth highlights not just the miracle of the long-awaited Messiah, but also the faith of ordinary people through whom God chose to work. Luke intentionally gave special attention to Mary, showing how God entrusted her with an extraordinary role despite her humble beginnings in small-town Nazareth. This is yet another in a long line of biblical examples of God working through people who seem to be unlikely choices by human standards.

Just like the passage in Matthew we studied last week, Matthew's account of Jesus's birth continued to emphasize that Jesus was the promised Messiah, fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. While Luke's account highlighted Mary's perspective, Matthew focused on Joseph's perspective when he found out Mary was pregnant. By law, Joseph could have had Mary stoned, but his initial plan showed compassion—he wanted to resolve the matter quietly to protect Mary from disgrace. When God intervened, explaining Mary's circumstances in a dream, Joseph obediently moved forward with the marriage, trusting God's plan over his own. And so, Jesus was born to an obedient couple with great faith.

❓ Where might God be calling you to display faith in Him today? How will you respond?

❓ How can we as a group encourage one another in showing faith in Jesus, even when it is difficult to do so?

❓ How does living faithfully for Jesus give us opportunity to tell others about Him?

Memorize

“See, I am the Lord’s servant,” said Mary. “May it happen to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.

- Luke 1:38, CSB

References

¹Renate Viveen Hood, “Women in the Bible,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

²A. Boyd Luter, “Luke,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1602.

³A. Boyd Luter, “Luke,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1605.

⁴Ibid.