

Birth of the King

December 7, 2025

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

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

Session Outline

1. Gabriel Predicts Jesus's Birth (Luke 1:26-38)
2. The Nativity of the Messiah (Matthew 1:18-25)
3. The Birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1-7)

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.



Leader Guide

Birth of the King

Introduction

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-wracking, 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?

Humble and Devout

Jesus's birth took place in humble circumstances, but all the figures surrounding His birth were pious and responsive to the hope of God.

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?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for sending Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer, in a humble and unexpected way. Thank Him for Mary and Joseph's example of faith and obedience, even when it was hard. Ask the Lord for help as you walk forward seeking this type of faith. Thank Him for working through every circumstance to accomplish His will and that through Jesus, we have forgiveness, hope, and eternal life.

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

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Luke* by Thabiti Anyabwile
- *Be Compassionate* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Exalting Jesus in Matthew* by David Platt

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Matthew

Purpose

Matthew probably wrote his Gospel in order to preserve written eyewitness testimony about the ministry of Jesus. Matthew's Gospel emphasizes certain theological truths. First, Jesus is the Messiah, the long-awaited King of God's people. Second, Jesus is the new Abraham, the founder of a new spiritual Israel consisting of all people who choose to follow him. This new Israel will consist of both Jews and Gentiles. Third, Jesus is the new Moses, the deliverer and instructor of God's people. Fourth, Jesus is the Immanuel, the virgin-born Son of God who fulfills the promises of the OT.

Author

The author did not identify himself in the text. However, the title that ascribes this Gospel to Matthew appears in the earliest manuscripts and is possibly original. Titles became necessary to distinguish one Gospel from another when the four Gospels began to circulate as a single collection. Many early church fathers (Papias, Irenaeus, Pantaenus, and Origen) acknowledged Matthew as the author. Papias also contended that Matthew first wrote in Hebrew, implying that this Gospel was later translated into Greek.

Setting

Determining the date of composition of Matthew's Gospel depends largely on the relationship of the Gospels to one another. Most scholars believe that Matthew utilized Mark's Gospel in writing his own gospel. If this is correct, Matthew's Gospel must postdate Mark's. However, the date of Mark's Gospel is also shrouded in mystery. Irenaeus (ca AD 180) seems to claim that Mark wrote his Gospel after Peter's death in the mid-60s. However, Clement of Alexandria, who wrote only twenty years after Irenaeus, claimed that Mark wrote his Gospel while Peter was still alive. Given the ambiguity of the historical evidence, a decision must be based on other factors.

Special Features

This Gospel was written from a strong Jewish perspective to show that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.

Extended Commentary

Matthew 1:18-25

1:18 The words of Jesus Christ are in an emphatic position in the Greek text, implying that the circumstances of Jesus's birth differed from those of everyone else in the genealogy. Although several of those people were conceived by miracles, they all had a human father. Only Jesus was born of a virgin. Mary had been engaged to Joseph. However, ancient Jewish engagement was as legally binding as marriage. The couple did not live together or engage in sexual intercourse. But the engagement could only be ended by divorce (thus, Joseph's decision in 1:19). Before they came together means that Joseph and Mary had not yet had intercourse. Joseph thus assumed that Mary had been unfaithful. Pregnant from the Holy Spirit means that Mary's pregnancy was a miracle performed by the Spirit, not that God assumed material form and physically impregnated her. This makes Jesus's conception dramatically different from Greek myths that speak of children born to gods who lay with women.

1:19 Joseph did not want to humiliate Mary publicly because he was a righteous man. His peers most likely expected him to expose her apparent sin, but true righteousness is characterized by compassion and mercy, an important theme for Matthew (5:6-7, 21-26, 38-48).

1:20 God spoke to Joseph through dreams, just as he did to his OT namesake (Gn 37:1-11). The title son of David reminded Joseph of his royal lineage and prepared him for the announcement of Messiah's birth. On conceived ... from the Holy Spirit, see note at v. 18.

1:21 Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua which means "Yahweh saves." The angel explained that Jesus's name revealed his purpose: He would rescue sinners from the punishment they deserve. This salvation would be experienced by his people, identified as those who follow Jesus.

1:22 Spoken by the Lord through the prophet implies that God was the ultimate author of the messages spoken and written by the prophets. The grammar that Matthew uses to introduce the quote from Is 7:14 (see Mt 1:23) suggests that the angel quoted this verse to Joseph during his announcement. Some interpreters argue that Matthew mishandled Is 7:14, but he seems to have handled it just as the angel did, which means his usage is backed by angelic authority.

1:23 The name Immanuel (God with us) implies Jesus's deity. Mary's virgin-born Son would be God himself living among his people. The Immanuel of Is 7:14 is to be identified with the person described in Is 9:2-7 and 11:1-9.

1:24-25 These verses emphasize Joseph's absolute obedience to the angel's instructions, a prevalent theme in these early chapters (2:13-15, 19-21). Joseph is a model of the obedience that should characterize Jesus's disciples (5:19-20). Did not have sexual relations with her confirms again that Jesus was the product of a virginal conception.⁵

Luke 1-2

Elizabeth and Mary (1:1-80)

After a crucial preface in which Luke explained his task, the author launched into a unique comparison of John and Jesus by showing how both represent the fulfillment of promises made by God. John was like Elijah, but Jesus had Davidic roles to fulfill and possessed a unique supernatural origin. John was forerunner, but Jesus was fulfillment. Everything in Luke 12 points to the superiority of Jesus over John, who obediently prepared the way.

Mary's hymn praises the faithfulness of God to His promise and His blessing of those who are humble before Him, setting up a major Lukan theme. Her praise is personal in tone. Zechariah reiterated the hope in national, Davidic

terms and set forth the superior relationship of Jesus to John. In doing so, Zechariah links spiritual promises and national promises to Davidic hope, another theme Luke would develop in the Gospel. The goal of salvation is to free God's people to serve Him without fear and to enable them to walk in God's path of peace. In these accounts Mary pictures the one who trusts God, Elizabeth is the one who rejoices in God, while Zechariah learns to trust God.

Jesus' Birth (2:1–52)

Jesus' birth took place in humble circumstances, but all the figures surrounding His birth were pious and responsive to the hope of God. Jesus was praised by a priest, by a humble virgin, by shepherds, and by a prophet and prophetess at the temple. All reflect high expectation from people who are portrayed as walking with God. Only the word of Simeon to Mary gives an ominous ring. The old man noted that Jesus would be a "light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to ... Israel." In fact, Jesus would be a cause of grief for Mary and division in Israel. Jesus is the "salvation" of God, but in the midst of hope is the reality that fulfillment comes mixed with pain and suffering.

Jesus' own self-awareness concludes the introductory overture in the Gospel. Here the young boy declares that He must be about the work of His father in the temple. Jesus notes His unique relationship to God and His association with God's presence and teaching.

This section, dominated by Old Testament allusions, opens the Gospel with notes of fulfillment and indications of God's direction. These emphases continue through the entire Gospel. John and Jesus are placed side by side in the stories of Luke 1, and then Jesus has the stage in Luke 2. The structure imitates the theology of forerunner-fulfillment.⁶

References

1. Renate Viveen Hood, "Women in the Bible," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).
2. A. Boyd Luter, "Luke," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1602.
3. A. Boyd Luter, "Luke," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1605.
4. Ibid.
5. Charles L. Quarles, "Matthew," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
6. *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998).