

The Life of Christ, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 2: Born of a Virgin: Immanuel Among Us

Luke 2:1–20

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson moves from the eternal Word of Lesson 1 to the moment that Word entered our world as a human infant. The central doctrinal claim is the virgin birth: that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. This is not a peripheral detail that can be quietly set aside. The virgin birth safeguards both the deity and the true humanity of Christ. He is genuinely human, born of a woman, entering our world as one of us; and He is genuinely God, conceived by the Holy Spirit, Immanuel, God with us. Treat the virgin birth and the incarnation as literal history, exactly as Luke and Matthew present them, and be ready to address gently the modern tendency to reduce these events to inspiring myth.

Luke himself insists on the historical character of these events. He names Caesar Augustus, the governor Quirinius, and a specific census, anchoring the birth of Jesus in the real world of dates and rulers. This matters because our faith does not rest on timeless ideas but on things God actually did in history. If the Christmas story is only a lovely legend, it can comfort us but it cannot save us. If it happened, then God has truly come near, and everything changes.

At the same time, this passage is rich with formational power. The humility of the manger confronts our pursuit of status. The joy announced to lowly shepherds rebukes our tendency to limit God's good news to the respectable. The shepherds model eager seeking and glad telling, while Mary models treasuring and pondering. Help your class hold the doctrine and the wonder together. The aim is not only that they would affirm that Jesus was born of a virgin, but that they would, like the shepherds, go to Him, and like Mary, treasure Him in their hearts.

Question 1

Student Question:

In verses 1 through 7, Luke surrounds the birth of Jesus with the names of rulers, a decree, and a census that brought Joseph to Bethlehem. How do these details show God quietly working out His promises (compare Micah 5:2), and why does Luke present this as real history rather than legend?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by noticing how much specific, verifiable detail Luke packs into these verses. A reigning emperor, a named governor, an empire-wide census, a journey to an ancestral town. Luke, who tells us at the start of his Gospel that he carefully investigated everything, is locating the birth of Jesus in datable history. He wants readers to know that these things happened in the real world.

Then show the hidden hand of God behind the visible hand of Caesar. The emperor issues a decree for his own purposes, taxation and control, and that very decree moves a poor couple from Nazareth to Bethlehem at exactly the right moment. Centuries earlier, Micah had prophesied that the ruler of Israel would come from Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Caesar thinks he is counting heads; God is keeping a promise. Help the class marvel that the Lord can use the ambitions of empires to fulfill His word.

Draw out why the historical character matters. Christianity is not a set of timeless principles that would be true whether or not anything happened. It rests on events: a real birth, a real death, a real resurrection. If these are legends, they may inspire, but they cannot redeem. Because they are history, the good news is not merely beautiful; it is true.

Apply it to the providence of God in their own lives. The same God who governed the movements of an empire to place His Son in Bethlehem governs the circumstances of His people now. Nothing is too large or too small for His purposes.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The historical reliability of the Gospel accounts, anchored in named rulers and datable events
- God's providence using even pagan rulers to fulfill prophecy (Micah 5:2)
- The fulfillment of prophecy as evidence of God's faithfulness and Christ's identity
- The difference between Christianity as historical fact and as inspiring myth
- God's sovereign care over the circumstances of His people

Discussion Prompts

- Why would Luke take such care to name rulers and a census in a story about a baby's birth?
- How does it encourage you that God used Caesar's decree to keep a promise made centuries earlier?
- Where might God be quietly at work in the ordinary circumstances of your life right now?

Question 2

Student Question:

The King of heaven entered the world through an exhausting journey, a crowded town, and a borrowed feeding trough. Where in your own ordinary, inconvenient circumstances might God be at work in ways you have been too distracted or discouraged to see?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This first self-examining question invites students to find themselves in the scene. The circumstances of Jesus' birth were not grand or convenient. They were tiring, crowded, and humble. Yet this was the setting God chose for the most important event in human history.

Help the class connect this to their own lives. We often assume that God works in the dramatic and the impressive, and we overlook Him in the ordinary and the difficult. The fatigue of a long week, the disappointment of a closed door, the hidden labor of caring for a family, these are exactly the kinds of places where God delights to work.

Encourage honesty about distraction and discouragement, which are the two great thieves of spiritual attention. Distraction keeps us moving too fast to notice; discouragement convinces us that God has overlooked us. Invite each person to name one ordinary or hard circumstance and to ask God to open their eyes to His presence in it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's presence and work in humble, ordinary, and inconvenient circumstances
- Distraction and discouragement as obstacles to seeing God at work
- Trusting God's providence when life feels unremarkable or hard
- The pattern of God choosing the lowly to display His glory

Discussion Prompts

- What ordinary or difficult circumstance are you in right now where it is hard to see God?
- How might distraction or discouragement be keeping you from noticing His work?
- What would help you pay closer attention to God in the routine parts of your week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Luke tells us plainly that Mary gave birth though she had no husband, for the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit (see Luke 1:34–35; Matthew 1:22–23). Why is the virgin birth essential to who Jesus is, and what does it teach us about His being both truly God and truly man from the very beginning?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is one of the doctrinal cores of the lesson, so handle it with both clarity and reverence. Luke and Matthew agree: Mary was a virgin, and the conception was the work of the Holy Spirit. This is presented as historical fact, not symbol. The angel told Mary plainly that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and that the child would be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

Explain why the virgin birth matters. It safeguards the true humanity of Christ, for He was genuinely born of a woman, sharing our flesh and blood. And it safeguards His deity and sinlessness, for He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and is the Son of God from the first moment of His human life. He did not become divine later; He was God in the flesh from conception. The virgin birth is the way Scripture shows us that this child is both fully God and fully man.

Connect it to prophecy. Matthew tells us this fulfilled Isaiah 7:14, the promise of a virgin who would bear a son called Immanuel. The virgin birth is not an awkward miracle the church later invented; it is the fulfillment of what God had promised long before. Removing it does not simplify the story; it unravels it.

Address the modern objection gently but firmly. Some treat the virgin birth as a pious legend that the church can do without. But if we surrender it, we lose the One who is both God and man, and with Him we lose the gospel. Encourage the class to receive it as Luke and Matthew give it, as the wondrous truth on which our salvation depends.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The virgin birth as literal, historical fact, conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35)
- The virgin birth safeguarding both the full deity and true humanity of Christ
- Jesus as God in the flesh from the moment of conception, not later
- The fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:22–23)
- The danger of treating the virgin birth as dispensable myth

Discussion Prompts

- How does the virgin birth protect both the deity and the humanity of Jesus?
- Why is it significant that Jesus was the Son of God from conception, not at some later point?
- How would you respond to someone who says the virgin birth is just a beautiful legend?

Question 4

Student Question:

The Lord of glory was laid where animals feed. What does the humility of His birth reveal about the heart of God, and where are you tempted to chase status, comfort, or recognition in a way that the manger gently rebukes?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Let the contrast do its work. The One through whom all things were made entered the world with no room, no crib, no comfort. The Maker of heaven was laid in a manger. This is not an accident of poverty alone; it reveals the very heart of God, who does not grasp at glory but stoops in love.

Connect the manger to the larger pattern of Jesus' life and to Philippians 2. The humility of Bethlehem foreshadows the humility of the cross. From the first, the Son of God chose the low place for our sake. The God we worship is not proud and distant; He is the God who stoops.

Turn the mirror toward the class. We spend enormous energy chasing what Jesus laid aside, status, comfort, recognition, the approval of others. The manger does not shame us so much as it invites us to a different way. Ask students to name one specific arena, work, social standing,

possessions, where the lowliness of Christ exposes a misplaced craving in them, and what humility might look like there.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The humility of the incarnation as a revelation of God's self-giving heart
- The manger as a foreshadowing of the cross (Philippians 2:5–8)
- The contrast between Christ's lowliness and our pursuit of status and comfort
- The call to imitate the humility of Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What does it tell you about God that He chose to enter the world in such lowliness?
- In what area of life are you most tempted to chase status or recognition?
- What would it look like to follow the pattern of the manger in that area this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

The angel announced "a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (v. 11). Take each title in turn, Savior, Christ, and Lord. What does each one declare about who this child is and what He came to do?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Take the three titles slowly, because each one carries enormous freight. "Savior" tells us why He came: to rescue people from sin and its consequences. The very name Jesus means that the Lord saves. From the first announcement, the shadow of the cross is already present; this baby was born to save.

"Christ" means Messiah, the Anointed One, the long-promised King in the line of David whom the prophets foretold. To call this infant the Christ is to say that the centuries of waiting are over, that God's promises are coming to their fulfillment in Him. He is the King Israel had longed for, though He would prove to be a very different kind of King than many expected.

"Lord" is the weightiest of all. In Luke's world this word carried the sense of divine majesty, the very title used for God. To announce that the child is Christ the Lord is to declare His deity. Savior, Christ, Lord: rescuer, promised King, and God Himself, all said of a newborn in a manger. Let the class feel the staggering claim packed into a single sentence from the angel.

Bring it to confession. These are the titles by which we still come to Him. To believe is to confess Jesus as Lord and trust Him as Savior and Christ. The angel's announcement is also our creed.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus as Savior, the one who rescues from sin (Matthew 1:21)

- Jesus as Christ, the promised Messiah and Son of David
- Jesus as Lord, a title of full deity and divine authority
- The unity of these titles in the one person of Christ
- Confessing Jesus as Lord as the heart of Christian faith (Romans 10:9)

Discussion Prompts

- Which of the three titles, Savior, Christ, or Lord, do you most need to grasp more deeply right now?
- What does it mean for daily life to confess Jesus not only as Savior but as Lord?
- How does it change the manger scene to remember that this infant is God Himself?

Question 6

Student Question:

The angel called this “good news of great joy that will be for all the people” (v. 10). Honestly, do you carry this news as great joy, or has it become routine? And who are the “all the people” you are tempted to leave outside the circle of that joy?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question has two edges. The first concerns joy. The angel announced great joy, yet for many of us the gospel has become familiar to the point of dullness. Familiarity is not the same as contempt, but it can quietly drain away wonder. Invite honest reflection on whether the good news still moves them.

The second edge concerns scope. The joy is for “all the people.” The first to hear it were shepherds, men on the margins of respectable society. God’s good news refuses our boundaries. Ask the class to consider who they are tempted to leave outside the circle, by class, by reputation, by past, by difference. The gospel that came to shepherds is for them too.

Move toward both renewal and mission. Renewed wonder and widened love tend to grow together. When we recover the joy of the news, we naturally want others to share it. Encourage each person to name one way to rekindle joy and one person or group they have been tempted to exclude.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel as good news of great joy, not mere routine
- The universal scope of the gospel, for all people
- God’s pattern of bringing good news first to the lowly and overlooked
- The link between recovered joy and a widened love for the lost

Discussion Prompts

- Has the good news of Christ become routine for you? What drained the wonder?
- Who are you tempted to leave outside the circle of the gospel's joy?
- What would help you recover a sense of great joy this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

The sign given to the shepherds was not a palace but a baby wrapped in cloths, lying in a manger, and God revealed His glory first to lowly shepherds rather than to the powerful. What does this teach us about the kind of King Jesus is and the kind of kingdom He brings?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Notice the strangeness of the sign. When God announces the birth of a King, we expect Him to point to a palace. Instead the sign is a poor baby in a feeding trough. The very lowliness is the sign. This King will not rule as the kingdoms of the world rule.

Notice also the audience. The glory of God blazed over shepherds, working men of low social standing, rather than over Herod's court or the temple elite. From the first moment, the kingdom of God overturns the world's order of importance. The last are first; the humble are lifted; the overlooked are honored.

This is a fitting place to begin shaping a right understanding of the kingdom, which will return throughout this study. The kingdom Jesus brings is not a worldly empire of force and status, and it will be established not by armies but through His life, death, resurrection, and the birth of His church. Let the manger and the shepherds set the tone: this King reigns through humility and grace.

Apply it to the class. If this is the kind of King we follow, then the marks of His kingdom in us will be humility, mercy, and a heart for the lowly, not the world's appetite for power and prestige.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The humble and gracious character of Christ's kingship
- God revealing His glory to the lowly rather than the powerful
- The kingdom of God overturning the world's order of status and power
- The marks of Christ's kingdom: humility, mercy, and care for the overlooked

Discussion Prompts

- Why would God choose a manger and shepherds rather than a palace and kings?
- What does this reveal about the kind of kingdom Jesus came to bring?
- How should the character of this King shape the way His followers live?

Question 8

Student Question:

When the shepherds heard the news, they hurried to see Jesus and then spread the word to others. Compare your own response to the good news about Christ. Where do you need to move from passive familiarity to eager seeking, and from quiet faith to glad telling?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The shepherds give us a model response in two movements. First, they hurried to seek; they did not debate or delay but went with haste to see the thing the Lord had made known. Second, they told; having seen, they could not keep silent, and they made widely known what they had been told.

Hold this up as a mirror. Many of us have settled into a passive familiarity with Jesus. We know the story, but we no longer seek Him with eagerness, and we rarely speak of Him to others. The shepherds had far less revelation than we possess, yet they responded with more urgency.

Press gently toward both movements. Seeking might mean returning to prayer and Scripture with fresh hunger, or making time to truly meet with Christ rather than merely knowing about Him. Telling might mean speaking naturally of Him to a friend, a neighbor, or a family member. Ask each person which movement, seeking or telling, God is calling them toward this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Eager seeking of Christ in response to the good news
- Bearing witness to Christ, telling others what He has done
- The danger of passive familiarity that no longer seeks or speaks
- The shepherds as a model of glad, urgent response

Discussion Prompts

- Are you more in need of seeking Christ eagerly or telling others gladly right now?
- What has dampened your urgency to seek or to speak?
- Who is one person you could tell about Christ this week?

Question 9**Student Question:**

Matthew tells us this birth fulfilled the prophecy, “they shall call his name Immanuel,” which means “God with us” (Matthew 1:23; Isaiah 7:14). Why is it vital that we hold the virgin birth and the incarnation as literal, historical fact rather than myth, and what would be lost if Jesus were merely a remarkable man and not God come in the flesh?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson. Bring together the threads: the virgin birth (Luke 1:35), the fulfillment of prophecy (Isaiah 7:14), and the meaning of the name Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23). The claim of Christmas is not that a great man was born, but that God Himself came in the flesh.

Make plain why this must be literal history and not myth. If Immanuel is only a symbol, then God has not actually come near; He has only inspired a comforting story. But Matthew and Luke present these as events that happened. The whole comfort of the name depends on its truth. God with us is good news only if God is actually with us.

Spell out what would be lost if Jesus were merely a remarkable man. A great man might teach us, inspire us, even die nobly for a cause, but he could not reconcile us to God or conquer death on our behalf. Only God in the flesh can be our Savior. Strip away the deity, and you are left with an example you cannot follow and a death that cannot save. The doctrine is not a barrier to the gospel; it is the gospel.

End on the wonder of the name. Immanuel means that the infinite God has bound Himself to us, not at a distance but in our very flesh, and that He remains with us still. The God who came near in Bethlehem is the God who is with His people now and forever (Matthew 28:20).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The incarnation as literal, historical fact, not myth or symbol
- Immanuel, God with us, as the heart of the Christmas message (Matthew 1:23)
- The fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in the birth of Christ (Isaiah 7:14)
- What is lost if Jesus is merely a great man and not God in the flesh
- The abiding presence of God with His people in Christ (Matthew 28:20)

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the comfort of the name Immanuel depend on it being literally true?
- What could a merely human Jesus not accomplish that God in the flesh accomplishes?
- What does it mean for you today that God is truly with us in Christ?

Question 10

Student Question:

Mary “treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart” (v. 19). Looking back over the whole account of Jesus’ birth, name one specific truth you want to treasure and ponder this week, and one way you sense the living Christ inviting you to draw near to Him because He first drew near to you.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question follows Mary's example. While others marveled and moved on, Mary held the events close and turned them over in her heart. Treasuring and pondering are spiritual disciplines we badly need in a hurried age. Help the class slow down rather than rush to a tidy application.

Invite specificity. Ask each person to name one truth from this lesson worth carrying through the week, the providence of God, the wonder of the virgin birth, the humility of the manger, the joy for all people, or the meaning of Immanuel. A single truth, treasured and pondered, will do more than a dozen truths quickly forgotten.

Close with the heart of it: He first drew near to us. The whole story is one of God coming down, seeking, stooping, dwelling among us. Our drawing near is always a response to His. Encourage students to write down their one truth and one step, and to return to it in prayer through the week, treasuring Christ as Mary treasured the things she had seen.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Treasuring and pondering the truth of Christ as spiritual disciplines
- Drawing near to God as a response to His drawing near to us in Christ
- The value of dwelling on one truth deeply rather than many truths shallowly
- Spiritual formation through unhurried reflection on the works of God

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from the birth of Christ do you most want to treasure this week?
- How does it move you that God drew near to you before you ever sought Him?
- What is one concrete way you will draw near to Christ in the coming days?