

Advent 3

Luke 1-2 & Matthew 1 – Leaders version

For a one hour study, just do the starred * questions

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

1. **SHOUT OUT** What do you already know about the account of Jesus' birth?

Download this onto the flip-chart. Try not to use the phrase 'the Christmas story' as it's not a story, it's a historical account.

What does the passage say and mean?

60 minutes

Read Luke 1:26-38

*2. What do we learn about Mary from Luke 1:26-28?

She lived in Nazareth, she was a virgin, she was engaged to Joseph, she was highly favoured by God, God was with her. (Something that we don't learn from the passage is that she was probably about 14 years old).

*3. **SHOUT OUT** What did the angel tell Mary? (v29-33)

Not to be afraid, that she had found favour with God, she would have a baby, she would call him Jesus (a common name at the time), Jesus would be great and called 'the Son of the Most High', he would be given the throne of King David (his ancestor (i.e. 'father')), he would reign over the house of Jacob (Israel) for ever, and his kingdom would never end.

4. How do you think Mary felt about that?!

These are stupendous claims to make about anyone, but particularly an unborn baby! This baby was going to be someone really special. Stunned? Afraid? etc

*5. What do the things that the angel told Mary about her baby tell us about the kind of person Mary's child would be? (v29-33)

You probably need to help them here, and it might help to list these things on a flip-chart.

Many Old Testament prophecies are wrapped up in the angels' message to Mary:

- This was to be no ordinary birth and no ordinary child.
- Isaiah 7 prophesies the virgin birth of a child called 'Immanuel', (meaning 'God with us') – Mary would have known the significance of a virgin birth.
- The name Jesus means 'the Lord saves' – this is a big name to tell Mary to give her child!
- The title 'Son of the Most High' refers to the coming Messiah, and the Son of God (Jesus was both).
- To be king over the house of Jacob, i.e. the nation of Israel, was another massive prophecy!
- And to have an unending kingdom is not possible on earth, so what could the angel mean? = Jesus' kingdom is an eternal kingdom.
- People who were told the words of the angel, at the time, would have understood that this was no ordinary child, he was someone very special indeed – he was sent by God and was going to save the people.

*6. Mary asked the angel a very sensible question in v34. What was it, and what was the angel's answer in v35-37?

Q. How can this happen to a virgin?

A. The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High (God the Father) (note the presence of the Trinity) will overshadow you – this conception will be a miracle. Thus the child will be called the Son of God and will be holy. Nothing is impossible with God. We all know that a spontaneous conception in a virgin is not possible, but that's the definition of a miracle – something that is supernatural i.e. outside of natural laws.

*7. Can you think of some other miracles in the Bible?

When they have named some miracles, think about the nature of these miracles – what do they show that Jesus has power to do, or authority over? (e.g. Walking on water = power over the laws of gravity, etc.) Encourage the group to acknowledge that these things are supernatural (v37).

8. **STICKERS** How would you respond if you had been in Mary's situation that day?

9. How did Mary respond to this news from the angel? (v38)

She said that she was God's servant and she surrendered to God's will for her life. It may be worth pointing out that it is a very unusual thing for an angel to speak to a person, and is not something we hear much of today! Bear in mind that some prisoners may be open to the supernatural in an unhealthy way, or may have mental illness involving hallucinations (seeing things or hearing voices that are not real).

10. **STICKERS** How do you think Joseph responded to the news when Mary told him that she was pregnant and an angel had visited her?

You may need to tell the group that Mary and Joseph would not have slept together before they were

married, remember, she was a virgin.

*11. Read Matthew 1:18-19. How did Joseph respond?

He decided to divorce her (being engaged was as good as being married, except they wouldn't live / sleep together, so to end an engagement meant divorce, which, in that society, was a terrible disgrace). But Joseph was going to divorce her quietly, so that she was not publicly exposed – Joseph acted with Mary's best interests in mind, which shows us his good character.

*12. The angel came to Joseph in a dream. What did the angel say in Matthew 1:20-23 and what did Joseph do in v24-25?

The angel said that Mary was innocent, i.e. she was still a virgin, and that Joseph should marry her. The angel repeated the message about the baby being a boy, who would be called Jesus ('the Lord saves'). Joseph obeyed the angel.

*13. Read Luke 2:1-7. God's Son, the King of the world, was not born in a palace, but a stable. What does this tell us about Jesus?

Jesus didn't use human authority or status to achieve his purposes. God the Father chose an ordinary girl, Mary, to give birth to God the Son, and to care for him and bring him up. The Son of God was not born in a palace with special privileges. Rather he knows what it is like to go without, to suffer, to be cold, to be hungry, to grieve etc. Jesus has been there – remember that he is interested in people that the world overlooks. God didn't want people to follow Jesus because of his humanity (fame / privileged status as a prince of the realm) but to follow him because of his divinity.

14. Why do you think it is important that we remember Jesus' birth, and not just what he did when he was grown up?

His birth reminds us of the incarnation – God becoming a man. Jesus was 100% God and 100% human.

*15. Do you know why it is so important that God became a man?

A chance to explain the gospel!

How can I live according to these truths in my life?

20 minutes

*1. Having learnt about Jesus' birth, do you want to learn more about his life and teachings?

Have some suggestions – reading the Bible, attending a Bible study, running the Christianity Explored course etc.

*2. If someone asked you why we celebrate the birth of Jesus, what would you say?

*3. Are you willing to do God's will, whatever it may cost you? How do you find out God's will for your life?

Try not to get involved in deep discussion about discerning the will of God – try to keep it focussed on finding out from the Bible what God's will is for our behaviour and how to live our lives in a manner that honours him – a separate study, 'What is God's will for my life?' is available in the Topic Bases studies section of the website. This is the priority right now for most of your group – not discerning a call to Africa (which would assume that the former was already in place)!

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15. Do you know why it is so important that God became a man?

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