**1. Motivate**

What’s a Christmas decoration, tradition, or memory that brings you joy?

* first ornament we bought the first year we were married
* ornaments created by our kids in an art class
* ornament purchased on a special trip (cruise, vacation to \_\_\_\_\_\_ , mission trip, …)
* traditional breakfast together as a family on Christmas day … now with all the grandkids
* the time we went on a cruise at Christmas time
* Christmas visit to Disney – all the decorations, special character meets, music, parades
* remembering the first Christmas tree we had – looked like Charlie Brown’s Christmas tree

**2. Transition**

We think of Christmas as a time of joy.

* If we’re missing loved ones or dealing with some other hardship, joy is difficult to realize.
* But … Jesus has *come*, giving us much cause for true joy.

**3. Bible Study**

A video introduction to the Bible study is available. View it at <https://tinyurl.com/msd97twj> If you don’t have wi-fi where you teach, it is best to download the video file to your computer from <https://tinyurl.com/5n7vxkpt>

3.1 A Humble Birth

Listen for hardships experienced.

Luke 2:4-7 (NIV) So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

What were the conditions in Bethlehem the night Jesus was born? (2:7)

* town was full of visitors
* many people there to register and pay tax
* no vacancies in what few lodging places there were
* Mary and Joseph had to stay in a stable … and that’s when the baby decided to be born

What were the difficulties involved in this trip?

* travel, in general would have been tough (90 miles, uphill, trip of 3 – 4 days)
* Mary is 9 months pregnant
* no place to stay when they get there
* Baby decides to be born away from home

Actually, only the husband was required to go for the census registration – what are some possible reasons why Mary accompanied Joseph?

* just wanted to be with him
* people back home were talking about the less than 9 month bride being pregnant
* they might have decided to move there
* Joseph wanted to protect her from the talk

What are some things that are incongruous about the birth of the King of Kings?

* born of very poor parents, in what appeared to be questionable circumstances
* born in a very poor location
* might make modern ob-gyn folks nervous about the lack of facilities, cleanliness
* born in a small, inconsequential town
* very few people were aware of the events of that night

If the birth of Jesus was so momentous, why was He born in such humble circumstances?

* consistent with the Servant role of Jesus
* everything about Jesus would be miraculous
* His virgin birth, his conception
* His divinity/humanity combination (incarnation)
* His ministry
* His resurrection
* It showed his identification with all men
* It underlined the humanity of Jesus – there is no question of his humanity – he was not plunked down in a palace as a special grown up envoy of deity

Consider how God managed the events of history to get Joseph and Mary where He wanted them at the appropriate time.

* Jesus was prophesied to be born in Bethlehem
* Mary was engaged to Joseph who was a direct descendant of King David
* Cesar declared a census, people had to register in their ancestral hometown
* That caused Joseph (along with Mary) to travel to Bethlehem … the city of David

What impresses you the most about the circumstances of Jesus birth?

* virgin birth
* He left heaven to become a man
* he limited himself to becoming a baby – did He limit his understanding, His ability to talk, to reason as a child – or did He fake it
* how conscious was He of His deity when He was 1, 2, 3, …
* He submitted to the authority of parents, even when He knew he was deity  
  (what if He had to endure a spanking – though undeserved)

⇒ He loved us enough to come and live in the squalor of a middle eastern village, knowing that one day He would endure a tortured death

3.2 Of Great Joy

Listen for an announcement.

Luke 2:8-12 (NIV) And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suppose you were a shepherd outside of Bethlehem some 2000 years ago … you’ve got the sheep settled down, you’re taking turns being on watch against predatory animals and thieves … a brilliant light appears in the sky. What are some possible responses?

* run away fast, dive under something to hide
* gather the sheep – don’t want a stampede
* try to wake up from your bad dream
* try to figure out what it is

List words of encouragement and celebration that appear in the angel’s announcement

* don’t be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy, the good news is for all the people
* a Savior has been born to you today, He is the Messiah, the Lord
* He is the Messiah, the Lord
* Here’s how you’ll know it is him …
* A great angel choir appeared praising God, pronouncing peace to men

Shepherds were at the bottom of the socio-economic structure in those days. We might say “country bumkins” or “rednecks”. Why then would God bring the news of the Messiah’s birth *first* to them? (There are hints in the passage)

* God was not concerned about social opinions,
* This was “good news of great joy that will be for *all* the people”, no matter who
* He wanted to stress that Jesus came for even the lowest strata of society

⇨ Jesus came for the rich and the poor, for the Jews and the Gentiles

* Savior born today in Bethlehem (town of David)
* He is the Messiah, the Lord
* the specific baby you should look for is one wrapped in cloths and lying in a feeding trough

What signs do *we* have to lead us to our Savior?

* God’s Word
* the record in the Gospels and Acts of His teachings, His sacrificial death, His work of redemption
* the teachings of all of scripture pointing to the Savior

3.3 Worthy of Praise

Listen for the concept of “peace”.

Luke 2:13-14 (NIV) Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

How many angels do you think were singing?

* a great company
* the heavenly host
* would this be thousands? tens of thousands? hundreds of thousands? millions?

The message of the singing angles was …

* Praising God
* Glory to God in the highest
* On earth, peace
* Peace to men on whom God’s favor rests

Why do you think the angels praised God for His peace following the announcement of the Savior’s birth?

* this is the main reason Christ came as Savior
* man and God have been enemies, ever since Adam and Eve sinned
* Jesus would solve the sin problem, bringing peace between men and God

What other kinds of peace would Jesus, the Messiah bring to the earth?

* peace between/among men … when the sin problem is solved, we are able to live as God intended
* peace within oneself … no longer plagued by guilt
* peace and contentment with life … when we are trusting God, we don’t need to be constantly desiring for something else
* peace in the midst of the conflicts that are a part of life … we have the assurance that God is ultimately in charge, God is sufficient for every need

The shepherds received a joyful *personal* announcement about Jesus. How can we make the joy of Christmas *personal* to those around us?

* give meaningful gifts, not just something that is nice and expensive enough to keep up appearances
* give the gift of your personal attention and time with those around you … listening, sharing their joys, dreams, sorrows
* find someone who is hurting and personally minister to them, to their hurt

Use the last page as a handout so your learners can take home the application points of this week’s lesson.

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Reflect.

* Spend a moment reflecting on the time you received God’s gift of salvation.
* How old were you? How did that decision bring you joy?
* What was the catalyst of your decision to follow Jesus?
* If you haven’t received salvation, you’ll never have a better time than now. Go to the inside cover page for more information about how to become a Christian.

Celebrate.

* If you want to experience a simple taste of joy, celebrate someone.
* Write a note, give a gift, and share a story with someone you know.
* In so doing you could bring joy through an encouraging act of kindness.

Give.

* Second Corinthians 9:7 reminds us that God loves a cheerful giver.
* So many research studies claim that the most joyful people on Earth are the givers.
* Test it on yourself. Give sacrificially to the needy.
* Make plans to give more than you’ve ever given to mission work.
* A great place to start is the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for world missions.

Cryptogram Puzzle

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This is Spiros the Christmas spy, wishing you a Merry Christmas from the underground church in Cuafi Menmaucos. They have sent out this message of encouragement via a diplomatic bag to the church in the free world. The message is encrypted, and they provided a key through a different embassy. Unfortunately there was water damage, and a portion of the key was torn off somewhere on the way. Use the numbers in the key to determine what letters go in the message below. Technical help is available at <https://tinyurl.com/5n7vxkpt> Alternative Fun Family Activities can also be found there.