

One family. One journey.
One child who would change the world forever.



The Nativity Story YouthWorker Kit



the *nativity* story

december 2006



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The Nativity Story

33 / **Introduction**

34 / **Timeline**

35 / Article: **The Humbling Starts Here**

36 / Article: **A Righteous Dude**

37 / Article: **Really. A Virgin?**

38 / Session One: **Unplanned Pregnancies**

40 / Session Two: **A Trip At The Worst Time**

42 / Session Three: **A Child Is Born**

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the **nativity** story

INTRODUCTION

You know the Christmas story inside and out. You know the flow of events, the cast of characters, the intimate details, and even the ancient prophecies that foretold it all. You know many of the misconceptions, misunderstandings, and mistakes that many people have about the story. You started learning the story before you could even walk or talk. And every year, you hear the story again.

Your challenge as a youth leader tasked to teaching that familiar story to teenagers once every year is to find a way to make the familiar into something exciting, insightful, or even interesting. You need to find something, ANYthing, to bring to the surface the phenomenal wonder and mystery of the Christmas story.

I have some great news for you! Coming in December is a movie that will make Christmas more than “meaningful” for you and your young friends.

I know what you’re thinking. “Not another Christmas movie! Puhleeze tell me this isn’t just another Christmas movie.” Okay. *The Nativity Story* isn’t just another Christmas movie. Seriously. This is the work of a major Hollywood studio. The mainstream movie industry hasn’t created a film like this in maybe 50 years. Top-notch talent has been involved in every phase of production of *The Nativity Story*. The screenplay isn’t a typical and predictable retelling of the Christmas narrative; instead it is an engaging recreation of the events from so long ago.

The filmmakers are bringing an unprecedented level of commitment to ensure the authenticity of *The Nativity Story* as well as the film’s look. Director Catherine Hardwicke, a former production designer, was adamant that every detail—from the locations, to the sets, to the props—look and feel authentic. Hardwicke, writer Mike Rich, and production designer Stefano Ortolani spent countless hours researching the era.

“We got the script into the hands of as many historians and theologians as possible,” says screenwriter Mike Rich. “They have all helped elevate the authentic look and feel of this film from a standpoint of culture and tradition.”

Because the actual locations of Bethlehem and Nazareth have become fairly modernized over the years, the production decided to shoot in the village of Matera, Italy, which has been virtually unchanged for centuries (and was previously used as a location for *The Passion of the Christ*). Additionally, the production journeyed to Ouarzazate, Morocco where it shot scenes involving Herod’s castle and the

temple of Jerusalem at the same locations used in such films as *Gladiator* and *Kingdom of Heaven*.

The Christmas Opportunity

There is something special about the Christmas holiday. For obvious reasons, Christians consider Christmas as one of the most “holy” of “holy days” (which is where the word “holiday” comes from), and take a dim view of the ever-increasing commercialization and trivialization of the season.

Irreligious people also revere Christmas. Christmas traditions and music are strong triggers of family memories, togetherness and love. The story of a child born to save the world is compelling in its mysterious simplicity.

Everyone gets the Christmas spirit.

Recognizing this as an opportunity, youth leaders and churches work hard every year to communicate “the real meaning of Christmas” to as many people as they can reach. Christmas plays, live manger scenes in front of the church, Christmas concerts,

Christmas parties, caroling, and other special events clog the church’s December calendar.

The last thing you need is yet another Christmas event. That’s exactly why this material is designed to fit in with what you are already doing with your young friends during December. You’ll find three sessions with background information that you can use in your regular weekly meetings. The sessions are designed so that the first two take place before you take your group to see *The Nativity Story* in the theater, and the third is a follow-up to that experience after the movie.

The Nativity Story is an opportunity that you should take advantage of. It has everything going for it—excellent production values, excellent spiritual value, excellent momentum-of-the-season value—all you have to do is plug in the dates on the included timeline, use the three sessions, and see how God uses your efforts to bring glory to Himself. What could be easier?

EVENT TIMELINE

Here's a suggested timeline that you can follow as you prepare to make the most of this *The Nativity Story* opportunity to reach kids and build momentum for your group.

Now

- ✓ *Plan on packing an entire theater* – What would need to happen in order to have a teenager in every seat of a showing of the movie in a theater near you? Would you need to work with another church or several churches? What about connecting with your local parachurch youth programs (Young Life, Student Venture, Campus Life, etc.)? Dream big, and then get to work!
- ✓ *Determine your ticket purchase plan* – To get a private screening, you usually have to pay the going rate for every seat in the theater. Group-rate tickets are cheaper, and even though you won't have the theater to yourself, you'll create all kinds of energy and enthusiasm by packing the house with teenagers. Check with your local theater about your options.
- ✓ *Determine when you'll take your group to the movie* – You have several options to consider with a December movie. Many youth leaders will want to take their groups to see *The Nativity Story* on the opening night/weekend of December 1st. Since Winter Break happens shortly thereafter, you might want to take your group to a matinee showing during the week. That has two advantages: tickets will be cheaper, and you can follow up an afternoon showing with a *The Nativity Story* event for your group that same evening. Either way, plan your show date, and then back-fill all the ideas listed below.

Six Weeks Out (the last week of October)

- ✓ *Form a Nativity Team* – You'll need help if you're going to make the most of this ministry opportunity. Pull together a team of adults who can help you with the various needs of this kind of program. Put different people in charge of Prayer, Publicity, Transportation, Ticket Sales, and Programming. Have them start work immediately.
- ✓ *Have a Parent's Meeting* – Show the movie trailer to the parents, talk about your plans, answer questions, get feedback, sign up volunteers, and PRAY!
- ✓ *Show the Teaser Trailer* – Let the excitement begin by showing the teaser trailer to your youth group and talking about the ministry potential of this opportunity.

Five Weeks Out (the first week of November)

- ✓ *Begin Promoting* – In addition to your regular publicity methods, consider doing some of these:
 - *IM* – Encourage your leaders and students to use Instant Messaging to their friends about the movie.
 - *Ringtones/Themes* – Have a "Who Has The Coolest Christmas Phone?" contest each week during your youth meetings, with the winner of

the previous meeting taking on the challengers. Judge phones on the basis of coolest desktop, ringtones, etc. Award the final winner two free tickets to the movie, one for him or her and one for a pre-Christian friend.

- *Email Nativity Postcards* – Graphics from the movie are available online at www.thenativitystory.com. Use them to create great-looking emails that you send to your kids.
- ✓ *Initiate Prayer Effort* – Unfortunately, many youth leaders make great plans and then merely pray that God will bless their efforts. In this case, you need a prayer team to talk to God about the pre-Christian kids that need to see the movie. You need prayer team members who will each take on one or two students from your group and pray for them daily – that those students will be bold and invite their friends to the film.
- ✓ *Show the Trailer* – Keep building the enthusiasm for this film.

Four Weeks Out (the second week of November)

- ✓ *Keep Praying* – Ask your students to identify two "I wanna ask 'em" friends that your prayer team can start praying for.
- ✓ *Keep Promoting* – If you can, have different *Nativity* "characters" show up at your youth meetings to give announcements, participate in skits, etc. Place the movie posters in the best places and have lots of flyers available.
- ✓ *Start Selling Tickets* – Do what some professional football teams do and sell only pairs of tickets. That way you'll encourage your students to bring an unchurched friend with them to the movie.
- ✓ *Show the "Behind the Scenes" featurette video* – The more that your students know about the film, the more likely they will be to invite their unchurched friends to attend a showing of the movie with them.

Three Weeks Out (the third week of November)

- ✓ *Keep Praying* – Your Prayer Team could plan a prayer chain to be in action during your *The Nativity Story* movie showing and event.
- ✓ *Keep Promoting* – Encourage your students to SMS (text message via cellphone) their friends about the movie – maybe using Christmas phrases such as, "We three kings" or "No room in the Inn" or "Away in a manger." Keep sending out those emails and handing out those flyers. Have a *Nativity Story* insert about your event placed in your church's bulletin, and ask to make an announcement from the pulpit during your church's services.
- ✓ *Keep Selling Tickets* – By now you should have an idea if you need to snag even more seats in the showing at the theater.
- ✓ *Show a Promo Video* – Play any of the videos available—whichever works best for you.

Two Weeks Out (the fourth week of November)

- ✓ *Do NOT cancel youth group because of Thanksgiving!* – With the movie opening in just two weeks, you need to keep the momentum going. If necessary, move your meeting to Tuesday evening to avoid the Wednesday evening travel plans that many families have.
- ✓ *First special Nativity-themed Meeting* – Refer to the complete Leader Guide and Student Guide.
- ✓ *Phone-chain* – Since you might not see many of your kids at church over the holiday weekend, initiate a program to call each student on your list, talk to them about going to the movie, and ask about the friends they're bringing with them. Report any new names of friends to the prayer team.
- ✓ *Show a Promo Video* – Play any of the videos available—whichever works best for you.
- ✓ *Keep praying for the kids, promoting the movie, and selling tickets.*

One Week Out (the last week of November/first week of December)

- ✓ *Second special Nativity-themed Meeting* – Refer to the complete Leader Guide and Student Guide.
- ✓ *Finalize Transportation* – Make sure you have enough vehicles and drivers. Gather all the materials that you plan to have in each vehicle.
- ✓ *Confirm Tickets* – Make sure you have enough ordered to handle inevitable last-minute additions.
- ✓ *Keep praying for the kids, promoting the movie, and selling tickets.*

Movie Week

- ✓ *Five-Senses* – A teenager's *Nativity* movie experience does not start when they sit in the chair at the theater; it begins when they pull into the parking lot at the church. Plan for what the "arrival and check in" area at your church will be by asking the "five senses" questions: What do you want kids to SEE when they get to the church? What do you want them to HEAR? TOUCH? TASTE? SMELL?
- ✓ *Reconfirm Transportation* – Make sure you have one or two cars on standby in case you have a lot of "walk ups" – kids who just "show up" to see the movie and who you had no idea were coming.
- ✓ *Reconfirm Ticket Count* – See "Reconfirm Transportation" – You're better off having a few too many tickets than too few.
- ✓ *Sign-In* – Prepare "Nativity Cards" (cards that the kids fill out) so you can get the contact information on each student attending the movie with your group.

One Week After

- ✓ *Within 24 hours* – Have someone personally contact each student who attended the movie with your youth group. Invite each student to the follow-up *Nativity* youth meeting.
- ✓ *Final Nativity-themed Session* – Refer to the complete Leader Guide and Student Guide.

The Humbling Starts Here

- a) *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:*
 b) *Who, being in very nature God,*
 c) *did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,*
 d) *but made himself nothing,*
 e) *taking the very nature of a servant,*
 f) *being made in human likeness.*
 Philippians 2:5-7 (NIV)

In these lines is some of the deepest theology in Scripture. So that you can teach your teenaged friends some of the mystery of the nativity, let's take a look at these verses line by line.

a) Copping An Attitude

This passage comes as part of Paul's teaching concerning unity among believers. Unity can only be achieved when people humble themselves and consider the needs of others before their own needs. Such humility is a choice – a mindset that doesn't just happen naturally. A literal translation of this line is, "Keep thinking this among you, which [attitude] was also in Christ Jesus." We cannot have the same ministry Jesus had, but we CAN have the same attitude He did.

b) Before Christmas

The verb "being" carries the sense of "existing" and is stated in the Greek present tense – denoting a continuing condition. Jesus didn't exist as God and then stop being God at Christmas. He has continually existed as God. "In very nature" could be better translated "in the form [*morphe*] of" – meaning that His outward manifestation of being God corresponded to the essence of being God eternally. There was never a time that Jesus wasn't God.

c) Mine! It's All Mine!

Before the Nativity events occurred, Jesus was equal with the Father and Holy Spirit. But, He resolved not to cling to that status. He had no need to grasp at equality with God, for He already possessed it. Jesus did not hold tightly to His status – His fist did not clench His title; instead He held it with an open hand.

d) Emptied

The One who existed in the form of God emptied [*ekenosen*] Himself. Many theories try to define what He emptied Himself of, but here's what we know. He did not empty Himself of "the form of God" (i.e., His deity) — He set aside the manner of existence as equal to God. The theologian and Bible commentator **J. B. Lightfoot** wrote, "He did not lay aside the divine attributes, but the

insignia of majesty." (*Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, reproduction of 1913 edition.)

e) Prince and Pauper

Mark Twain's novel *The Prince and The Pauper* describes a son of Henry VIII who temporarily changed positions with a poor boy in London. That story (your kids are likely familiar with the Disney film adaptation) illustrates this line of Scripture. Our Lord took on the form of a very lowly servant when he was born. (Note that the phrase, "the very nature of" in this line is the same phrase used in line b.) He could have come as a full-grown man conquering the Romans and establishing His kingdom reign. But, he chose to enter human life as a helpless infant, born to a poor couple from a poor and obscure town. What a stellar example of humility!

f) The Same, But Not The Same

Since angels also are servants, Paul makes clear that Jesus became human. The word Paul used that's translated "likeness" doesn't mean "exactly the same" but stresses similarity and leaves room for differences. Although Jesus became a genuine man, there were certain respects in which He was not absolutely like other men. For instance, He did not have a sin nature as all people do. And, He was both a man and God – nobody else can make that claim and avoid the loony bin.

The great humbling that culminated on the cross and guaranteed our salvation began when Jesus did not hold tightly onto His status and existence as God. He emptied Himself, decided to have a servant's role, and became a lowly baby. The exact "how's" and "why's" of that momentous event may never be fully understood this side of Heaven.

I guess that's why Christmas remains a marvelous mystery.

A Righteous Dude

The Bible tells us that Joseph was a “righteous” man (**Matthew 1:19**). Righteous. God doesn’t honor very many people with that term. *Righteous*. Joseph’s righteousness was severely tested when he discovered that Mary was pregnant. There was more going on in that situation than we realize. While Luke focuses mostly on Mary, Matthew’s gospel emphasizes Jesus’ purity by telling of the obedience of the family who raised Jesus. Here are a few of the issues that Joseph had to wrestle with—in a righteous way.

Percolating Hormones

Jewish men in that era usually married at the age of 18 to 20—right when a guy’s hormones are percolating ferociously. In contrast, Jewish women often married as soon as they reached puberty. There was tremendous cultural pressure in Jewish society to remain chaste before marriage, but the assumption then, like now, was “if a man and woman are alone together for more than twenty minutes, they have had intercourse” (Delaney 1987:41). Joseph was faithful to his future spouse in advance, and he expected the same. Even after they were officially married, Joseph controlled his passions and refrained from having sex with Mary until after Jesus was born (Matthew 1:25). Such self-control is a hallmark of Joseph’s character, and one reason he earned the “righteous” tag.

A Blatant Betrayal

That Joseph was planning to divorce Mary further shows his righteousness. His actions showed his deep commitment to marriage—he viewed infidelity as unjust, and divorce as a way of protecting faithfulness in marriage. Even though their marriage had not been consummated, their engagement was as legally binding as marriage, and their relationship could only be severed through divorce. When Mary’s pregnancy was discovered, Joseph could only do one thing in response to what seemed to him to be her dishonor of him: divorce her. He probably didn’t know Mary well, and had little reason to trust her innocence. In those days, a wife’s adultery implied the husband’s inadequacy or his family’s poor choice of a mate (the marriage was “arranged” by the husband’s family), and Mary’s unfaithfulness would have shamed Joseph and his family. But, Joseph wanted to divorce her “quietly,” a decision that shows his compassion for

Mary even in the face of her seeming disloyalty to him. His commitment to the sanctity of marriage is part of what made him “righteous.”

It’s The Law

Joseph had no option of giving Mary a second chance. Roman and Jewish laws demanded that a man divorce his wife if she were guilty of adultery. Roman law actually viewed as a pimp a husband that did not divorce his unfaithful wife, and viewed his wife as a prostitute. Jewish law had a tradition of a death sentence by stoning of an adulteress—a law that was removed from the books by the Romans who were the only ones who could pass down a death sentence. Apparently, adultery was a big deal in this culture, and strictly illegal. For Joseph NOT to divorce Mary after being visited by the angel meant that he was going against the culture and the law. Obeying God’s instructions rather than his society’s made Joseph a righteous man.

Saying “Goodbye” To Success

Joseph’s reputation was at stake in this situation. Unless he divorced Mary, others would assume that he had gotten Mary pregnant. If Joseph would have divorced Mary publicly he could have impounded her dowry, and maybe been reimbursed for the bride price if he paid one at betrothal. But he didn’t. And because he didn’t divorce Mary, he would be an object of shame in a society dominated by the value of honor. Joseph’s obedience and compassion made him lose his reputation and with it any chance of building a successful business. In essence, Joseph was dooming himself to a lifetime of being a poor handyman, doing what little pick-up work he could find. No one in that culture would trust him with much. He would not be able to build on his own father’s business. He would live a life of unfulfilled hopes and dreams.

But, he would be one righteous dude!

He would shape the character and memories of the Son of God. He would teach Jesus his craft of woodwork. He would be closer to Jesus than any other man on earth. He would be blessed beyond measure, even if everyone he knew considered him unworthy of honor. God would call him “righteous” — and 2000 years later, so would we.

Really. A Virgin?

Ask the kids in your youth ministry, “What makes the virgin birth such a big deal?” and you’re likely to be met with blank stares. Some of your super-spiritual kids might give an answer that mentions fulfilled prophecy or mumble something about showing that Jesus is super-natural. But, today’s Christian teenager is usually unaware of how absolutely fundamental and vital the virgin birth was in God’s plan of redemption.

The general concept of a miraculous birth—the story of divinity entering the human experience by the only doorway available to it—is found in many religions and secular traditions. It is found in religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam,

Judaism, and Zoroastrianism; and it’s found in Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Greco-Roman and Hellenistic traditions. But, the specific incident of a young woman being a virgin and yet giving birth to deity is unique. Except in the case of Jesus Christ that way of birth had never happened before nor will it ever happen again.

Warning! Theology ahead!

So, why is a virgin birth a part of Jesus’ story? Though some scholars include revealing God, bridging the chasm between God and humankind, saving humankind, and rescuing the whole creation as the purposes of the virgin birth of Christ, they are actually the purposes of the *incarnation* of Christ. The virgin birth was the *means* of the incarnation of Christ. While the incarnation began at the birth of Jesus and continues forever, the virgin birth lasted only a matter of hours.

The distinctive purpose of the virgin birth of Christ was to free Him from the original sin in His incarnation. The ordinary processes of transmission of racial heritage were interrupted in His case by the miraculous conception.

But, we should not assume that the mere fact of a virgin birth would break the chain of sin. The unique circumstances associated with His birth help us to appreciate the fact that He was born without sin. The Bible declares that He “knew no sin” (**2 Corinthians 5:21**); and “in Him there is no sin” (**1 John 3:5**). Satan had nothing in Christ (**John 14:30**); he has no claim on the sinless Son of God. Leon Morris rightly says: “Sin gives Satan his hold on men, but there is no sin in Jesus as in others.” (F.F. Bruce, Gen. Ed., *The New International Commentary on The New Testament*, 18 vols. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984, Vol. IV: *The Gospel According to John*, By Leon Morris, p. 660)

Through the miraculous overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was born sinless. His conception served as a sign of the uniqueness of the Person who was born. Jesus’ virgin birth and His deity are inseparably connected. If Christ were born in the natural way—that is, if He had a human father—He could not be God. He would be just a human, and would have inherited the sinful nature. Jesus is God—not because He is born of a virgin; but because He is God, His incarnation had to be by way of a virgin birth.

So, yeah. A virgin birth. Really.

Leaders Guide: Session One

Unplanned Pregnancies

Theme

Jesus; Birth

Objective

Your students will identify with the significant issues that Zechariah and Mary had to handle: fear and uncertainty, faith and doubt.

Warm Up

The week before this meeting you need to enlist your most outgoing guy and girl to participate in a skit. The guy will play the role of bringing some news to the girl. Working with your two young friends, first come up with some “juicy news” for the guy to deliver. Make the “news” appropriate for your location and situation. For instance, the “news” could be, “The Chargers are going to the Super Bowl” or, “You’ve been accepted to UC San Diego.” Once you’ve determined your “news” you need to brainstorm four or five ways that the news can be communicated so that the news takes on a different meaning each time it’s told. For instance: *incredulous* – “The Chargers are going to the Super Bowl?!?”; *secretive* – “Psst. The Chargers are going to the Super Bowl”; *matter-of-fact* – you get the idea. The girl should respond appropriately to the news. Have this “skit” occur at random times during the first part of your meeting. The guy and girl should be wearing something different each time they’re performing.

Movie Trailer

Show the trailer, and then announce your plans to see the movie as a group. Explain that this isn’t just another cheesy Christmas movie, but the work of a major Hollywood studio. The mainstream movie industry hasn’t created a film like this in maybe fifty

years. Top-notch talent has been involved in every phase of production of *The Nativity Story*. The screenplay isn’t a typical and predictable retelling of the Christmas narrative; it is an engaging re-creation of the events from so long ago.

Transition

See how much your group knows about the “unplanned pregnancies” of the nativity story. Discuss questions such as these:

What relationship to Jesus did John the Baptist have? Who were John’s parents? What was the setting God used to announce to John’s father that his wife would become pregnant? Who told John’s dad about what was going to happen? What was the problem with John’s parents and pregnancy? What happened to John’s dad after he learned of God’s plan? Who told Mary that she was going to be pregnant? Where was Mary when she learned of her impending pregnancy? How did Mary respond to the news?

Bible Study

Luke’s gospel tells of two announcements of two unplanned pregnancies. The situations were vastly different; the responses were very different too. Hand out the Student Guides and use this outline to contrast the announcement to Zechariah and the announcement to Mary. (**Luke 1** is WAY too deep to communicate here all the awesome truth it contains, so I’ve hit some of the highlights. Feel free to go further with your personal study.)

- **Different Settings (Luke 1:5-12; 26-29)** – Zechariah was one of 18,000 priests and served in the temple twice a year, but only once in his life would he get to assist in the daily offering by going into the holy place.

On this day, he won the “lottery” and got to offer incense. Right in the middle of Zechariah’s religious activity before the whole nation in its religious center, Gabriel appeared to Zechariah. Five or six months later, in a small rural “truck stop” of a town in a region 45 to 85 miles north of Jerusalem, Gabriel again appeared, this time to Mary. We don’t know the exact setting, but it surely was vastly different from the temple in Jerusalem—a contrast between a very public setting and a very private one. Also note: Gabriel’s announcement was to John’s *father*, and to Jesus’ *mother*.

- **Similar Announcements (Luke 1:13-17; 30-33, 35-37)** – Gabriel told Zechariah that his prayer had been answered. Since Zechariah and his wife had given up on having children, his prayer was probably concerning his nation’s hope of a Messiah. Even so, having a child would fulfill a long-abandoned desire. So God was actually answering two requests at once—one national, the other personal. (Here’s a nice side-lesson: sometimes God’s answers to prayer come in surprising ways long after we’ve stopped praying them.) Gabriel’s announcement to Zechariah included the position, character and mission of the child. When Gabriel talked with Mary, the mood was very different. A simple calmness existed in the exchange between them. Gabriel’s announcement about Jesus included His position, His authority, and His divine ties. Note that whereas Gabriel said that Zechariah’s prayer was answered, he complimented Mary on her character and blessed position.
- **Different Responses (Luke 1:12, 18; 29, 34, 38)** – Zechariah’s initial startled reaction to the presence of an angel then moved to abject fear. He might have feared that he had

done something wrong in administering the incense for the nation and that the angel was going to harm him. When Gabriel told Zechariah about the unplanned pregnancy, Zechariah’s response was very human—he knew that he and his wife were too old to conceive a child. Zechariah, as righteous as he was, needed to learn that God would do what He promised. Zechariah’s temporary deaf/mute condition, a judgment from God, allowed the priest time to reflect on what he needed to learn. Mary’s initial reaction to Gabriel wasn’t about his appearance, but his opening greeting. She had no idea if what he said was good news or not. After hearing Gabriel’s announcement, Mary’s response wasn’t disbelief, but she did wonder what would happen. Since she didn’t know how God was going to create a child within her, she asked, “How WILL this be?” (Not, “How CAN this be?” which is basically what Zechariah wondered.) Mary’s faithfulness and obedient nature are seen in her final statement to Gabriel, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.”

Wrap Up

Explain that the contrast between Zechariah’s and Mary’s responses to Gabriel’s announcement isn’t a contrast between good and bad. Both were godly people. We learn from them that we can encounter God anywhere, at any time, in any circumstance. We discover from them that fear, uncertainty and misunderstanding are natural – and that we should have faith in the One for whom nothing is impossible. We learn that God answers prayer, that He works in the miraculous and supernatural, and that sometimes He chooses an individual to work through. Close in prayer.

The Nativity Story

Unplanned Pregnancies



Take notes as you study **Luke 1** to contrast and compare between how Zechariah and Mary responded to the announcement of unplanned pregnancies.

	Zechariah	Mary
Setting		
Announcement		
Response		

Leaders Guide: Session Two

A Trip At The Worst Time

Theme

Family Relationships

Objective

Your students will appreciate the love and relationship that they have with their extended families.

Warm Up

It's Crowded In Here – Kids love to see how many people they can cram into a small space. So, in this activity, give them several confined places for them to fill with as many bodies as they can. For instance, go out into the church parking lot and see how many kids can fit into your car. Find a small closet and see how many teenagers can fit inside. If you're brave, you might even try to do this in a bathroom stall. You could make this a competitive adventure if your group is large enough. Divide into teams that have more people on a team than could ever fit into your locations. See which team can get the most team members into the first location. The winning team gets to go first in the second location — and so on. Choose three or four locations, and let the kids have fun!

Transition

Explain that some people like to be in tight quarters with others, but that sometimes we need our space. This was the situation that Joseph and Mary encountered in Bethlehem when the time came for Mary to give birth to her son.

The Video

Show the behind-the-scenes video from the *Music Video Loop #55* DVD. Tell the group about the plans

to see *The Nativity Story* together. Emphasize the need to sign up and to bring friends.

Transition

Engage your group in a discussion of what they know about Joseph and Mary's trip to Bethlehem and about what the couple experienced there.

Bible Study

Hand out the Student Guides and have a student read **Luke 2:1-7** aloud for the group. Then develop your lesson around these talking points. Based on my research, I've taken a non-traditional look at the situation there in Bethlehem at that time, so proceed with caution.

- *A Trip At The Worst Time* – Explain about the trek to Bethlehem that Joseph and Mary took. We're not exactly sure when they made the trip. Everyone was ordered to report in at his or her hometown, but probably not all at once—otherwise, the whole nation would grind to a halt while everyone traveled. Joseph and Mary had to deal with the stigma of an unplanned pregnancy at home in Nazareth and probably welcomed the chance to get out of town. They might have arrived in Bethlehem weeks before the baby was due. Or, they might have arrived just as Mary's pregnancy reached the full term. We don't know. However, even if they traveled to Bethlehem some time before the baby was due, their trek (covering some 90 miles or so—if the more direct route through Samaria was bypassed—by foot and/or on the back of a donkey) must have taken quite a bit of planning and effort. Walking all day. Camping out at night or trying to find a place to stay. Dealing with the "I have to go to the bathroom—

right now" urge that women in Mary's condition have. Trying to explain to strangers the whole situation with Mary being pregnant, but not by Joseph. We cannot imagine the difficulties this young couple experienced on their journey.

- *Home For The Holidays* – Once in Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary would have naturally gone to the home of relatives. In their culture, family was required to care for family, and hospitality was expected, even to strangers. The expecting couple probably settled into a crowded house with other relatives who were in Bethlehem for the census. The word "inn" in **Luke 2:7** is not the word that was used for a place of public lodging. It is the word that was used for "guest room" or "spare bedroom." Unfortunately, we have a skewed vision of the situation there in Bethlehem. There wasn't a crowded inn with a surly innkeeper turning away a forlorn young couple just when they most needed assistance. Imagine the situation—distant relatives meeting Joseph's new wife, aunts and cousins helping her deal with her condition, uncles and grandfathers giving Joseph good-natured ribbing about being a new father. Love, warmth, and family surrounded Joseph and Mary.
- *Born In A Barn* – During that era, in most rural-ish homes (back then, Bethlehem was a tiny cross-road community on the road to Jerusalem) families kept their few livestock in a garage-type area that was usually below the main house. Because the house was so crowded at that time, a place needed to be prepared for Mary to deliver the baby. When Mary went into pre-labor (today we call mild pre-labor pains "Braxton Hicks Contractions" – they help get the mother's body

ready for the real deal), Joseph and his relatives cleaned out the livestock area so that Mary could have room for all the activity associated with giving birth – and to keep all the little kids—and men—from interfering with the process. The women attended to her, while the men waited, talked, and probably ate their version of junk food. We have no idea of how Mary's labor went—we don't know whether she was in labor for hours and hours, if there were "complications" that had to be handled, or if she handled the pain stoically or otherwise. But, we do know that she gave birth to a son, wrapped him in clean cloth, and laid him in a manger. We can surmise that she wasn't alone, but that the entire house was buzzing with every bit of the joyous energy that the birth of a child brings.

Wrap Up

Emphasize the importance of "family" during the Christmas season. The emphasis we place on being with our family for the holidays was what Joseph and Mary experienced when they were in Bethlehem. Instead of being alone, shuffled off to a barn or cave to deliver a baby, they were completely engulfed with extended family. Aunts, uncles, distant cousins, several-times-removed in-laws—all of David's descendants descended on Bethlehem and took up lodging with relatives. The love and warmth that Joseph and Mary experienced are what we should provide for our own families. When Jesus was born, He came into the world as a part of a family—as one of us. Close by having your students thank God for their families, and for coming as a little baby born in the midst of a family.

The Nativity Story

A Trip At The Worst Time



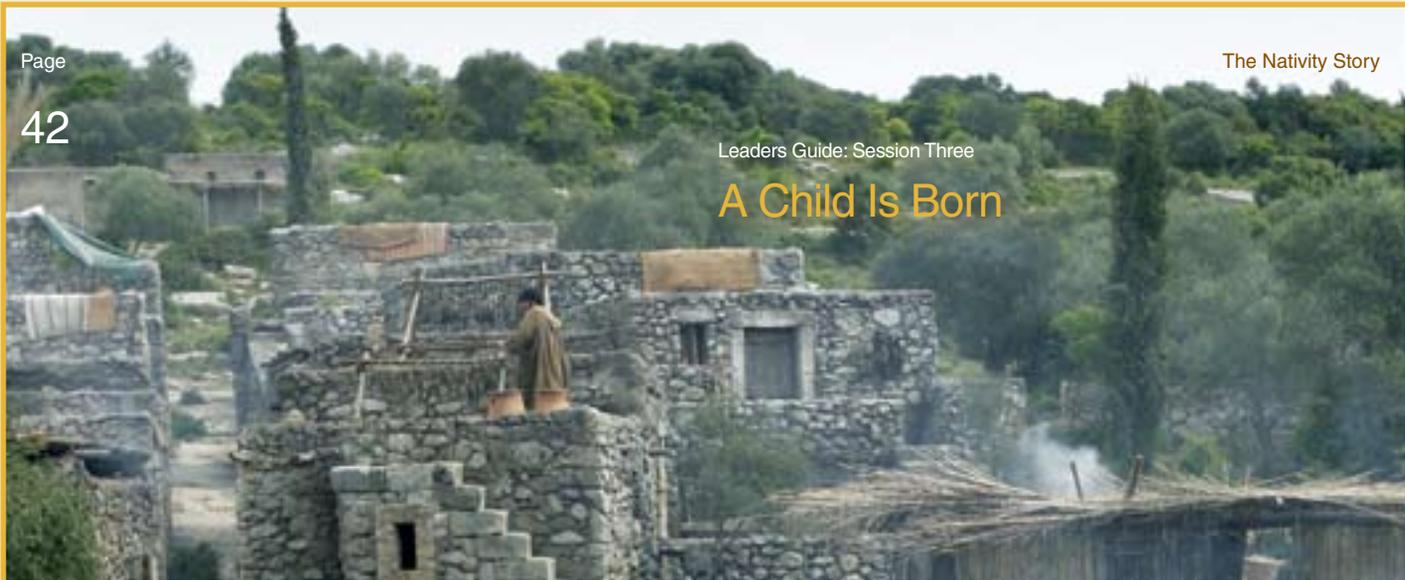
Luke 2:1-7 Take notes as you listen to the Bible study:

A Trip At The
Worst Time

Home For
The Holidays

Born In A Barn

A Child Is Born



Theme

Jesus' Incarnation

Objective

Your students will gain a deeper understanding of the love that God showed when He became a human being.

Warm Up

Communication Consternation

– Pass out the Student Guides and pencils. Give the group five minutes to write down as many methods or means of communicating as they can think of. You can give them some ideas such as, *skywrite* or *telephone*. Have some music playing in the background as they work. When the time is up, choose a student to read his or her list aloud. If other students have a same communication method on their list, then everyone crosses that item off. Have another student read the items remaining on his or her list aloud, and continue until everyone has read their list. Award the winner(s)—student(s) that have the most “unique” communication methods left—with an appropriate award(s) or prize(s).

Transition

Generate some discussion around these kinds of questions:

- What's your favorite form of communication? IM? Videochat? Cellphone? Smoke signals?
- What do you do when you want to make sure that your message is conveyed properly?
- Would you agree or disagree that we do a lot of our communicating without saying a word? Explain.

- How would you communicate most effectively with someone who uses a different language than you?
- What makes a face-to-face conversation more meaningful than a phone call or even a videochat?

Explain that God has used many different communication methods to get His message across. He used miracles, angels, and prophets to communicate to people. He used war and peace, drought and rain, nations and individuals—all in an effort to communicate with humankind. However, until He was born as an infant human – until His “incarnation” – God's communication efforts were one-way, removed, and fairly indirect. In the rest of this session we will look closely at how God became one of us, and the importance that has for our faith.

Bible Study

Use the “Really. A Virgin?” and “The Humbling Starts Here” articles to give you some insight about how important the fact is that Jesus is both God and man—a sinless man, who is also God. In this lesson, you'll be covering some deep theology and will need to understand the issues involved. Use these talking points to organize your thoughts and presentation. As you teach, have the kids take notes on their Student Guides.

- *What “Incarnation” Means (John 1:1-14; 2 John 1:7)* – God, who has existed everywhere, in all times simultaneously, who knows all, who is all powerful and all-everything, chose to become a human being. He chose to be born as a helpless infant, and lived His life in the confines of a human body. The immortal became mortal. The Creator became as one of the created. This idea con-

tradicts everything that people had previously thought about God, and was such a radical and illogical idea that even today many people have a hard time accepting it. Some people tried to resolve the logical problem by saying that Jesus was not God. Others taught that Jesus wasn't really human. But, the apostle John tells us boldly that the Word became flesh, and that He made His dwelling among us. This concept is so important, he says, that anyone who teaches otherwise is an antichrist. This doctrine is one of the few that the New Testament says is essential to the faith.

- *What The Incarnation Meant To God (Matthew 4:2; John 1:14; 4:6; 14:6; 19:28; Mark 13:32)* – Jesus began life as a fetus, completely helpless and dependant upon Mary to develop into an infant. Like all babies, He cried when He was hungry and fussed when He was uncomfortable. He learned to crawl, walk, run, and talk as all children do. In the process of learning, Jesus would have made mistakes. Imagine the frustration of being the unlimited God of the Universe, stuck in a human body! Even though Jesus made factual mistakes while learning, He never made moral mistakes. He never committed a sin – in fact, He didn't have a sin nature, thanks to being born of a virgin. Although Jesus didn't know everything (see **Mark 13:32**), He knew His limitations, and He did not teach errors. He is the Truth.
- *What The Incarnation Means To Us (Hebrews 4:14-16)* – Jesus is God in the flesh—a God-man. Jesus shows us that God is not just an idea or a list of doctrines, but a living being who wants a relationship with us. To make this relationship possible, the Son of God humbled Himself

to become a human. Jesus is the best example of God we can see in this life—so much so that if we reject Jesus, then we are also rejecting God. If Jesus were not God, He could not save us. If He were not human, He could not pay our penalty for us. We may not understand exactly how He did it, but we recognize that our salvation depends on Jesus being both God and human. And since He experienced life as a human, we can be confident that He understands us when we struggle with our temptations. We can look to Him for the help and grace that we need to live as He did. Jesus is the perfect role model for us.

Wrap Up

How you finish this session will be determined by the kind of group you have. You may want to conclude with a group prayer of praise and thanksgiving for the sacrifice that Jesus made to become human. You might consider explaining the Gospel clearly, and inviting students to begin their relationship with God. Choose a closing that fits your needs.

The Nativity Story

A Child Is Born



Communication Consternation

Write down as many methods or means of communicating as you can think of. You'll score a point for each "unique" communication method left on your list once everyone has read what he or she has written.

What's It Mean?

What "Incarnation" Means
John 1:1-14; 2 John 1:7

What The Incarnation Meant To God
Matthew 4:2; John 1:14; 4:6; 14:6; 19:28; Mark 13:32

What The Incarnation Means To Us
Hebrews 4:14-16