

Christmas Incarnation

Appendix: Class Handouts

In this section you'll find the discussion questions. You are free to print out the class or group handouts without any payment. These may be found at:

www.jesuswalk.com/christmas-incarnation/christmas-incarnation-questions.pdf

1. Mary, the Virgin Mother (Luke 1:26-45)
2. Joseph, the Stand-In Father (Matthew 1:18-25)
3. The Shepherds' Sign of the Manger (Luke 2:1-20)
4. Wise Men and the Christmas Star of Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1-12)



Georges de la Tour (1593-1652), "The Newborn" (1640s), Oil on canvas, 76 x 91 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes.

1. Mary, the Virgin Mother (Luke 1:26-45)

The points of this announcement.

- Mary will become pregnant.
- Mary will give birth to a son.
- The child must be given the name "Jesus" (see Matthew 1:21).
- The child will become a great person.
- His title will be "Son of the Most High."

He will inherit "the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever," in other words, he will be the long anticipated King of the Jews, the Jewish Messiah, the "Son of David," who will reign over the Kingdom of God.

Finally, "his kingdom will never end."

Discussion Questions:

Q1. (Luke 1:31-34) What did the angel's announcement say about who Mary's Child was and who he was to become?

Q2. (Luke 1:34) In what way does Mary's "How?" question (1:34) to the angel's declaration differ from Zechariah's "How?" question (1:18)? Why was Mary rewarded and Zechariah disciplined?

Q3. (Luke 1:35) What does the virgin conception teach us about Jesus' nature? How central is the doctrine of the virgin conception to the Christian message?

Q4. (Luke 1:38) What is the essence of Mary's positive response to the angel? What can we learn from her response for our own lives? In what sense was Mary's response an "informed consent"? When we respond to God, what do we consent to?

Q5. (Luke 1:42-43) In what sense are the titles "Blessed Virgin Mary" and "Mother of God" appropriate for Mary? Why are we sometimes hesitant to exalt her as "blessed among women"?

2. Joseph, the Stand-In Father (Matthew 1:18-25)

Q1. What would Jesus have learned as the son of a carpenter? What experiences would this have exposed him to?

Mary's pregnancy had placed her at considerable risk in this society:

1. **Husband.** Her betrothed husband would reject her.
2. **Penalty.** At worst she could be stoned (Deuteronomy 22:13-30).
3. **Shunning.** She and her bastard child would be shunned.
4. **Remarriage.** The stigma of her supposed adultery would remain with her and taint the reputation of any husband.
5. **Nowhere to go.**

Q2. (Matthew 1:19) What were Mary's options being pregnant and carrying a baby not her husband's? What kind of character did Joseph exhibit by deciding to divorce Mary quietly and leniently?

Q3. (Matthew 1:21) What is the significance of the name Jesus? Why do you think the angel gave the name to both Mary (Luke 1:31) and Joseph independently?

Prophecy in the Old Testament takes several shapes, including:

1. **Exhortation**, a directive word from God to a particular person or people at a particular time.
2. **Prediction**, a clear foretelling of the future for a person or nation.
3. **Acted prophecy** (Hosea 1:2).
4. **Foreshadowing**, where a contemporary prophetic event or insight foreshadows a distant one, so there is a double fulfillment – a present-time fulfillment (the type) and a future completion (the antitype) which brings the prophecy to fullness or completion.

Q4. (Matthew 1:23) How did the prophetic concept of the virgin conception and the name "Immanuel" find their fullness in the birth of Jesus to Mary?

Q5. (1:24-25) What does Joseph accepting Mary as his wife say about his character? What is the significance for prophetic fulfillment of Jesus as a Son of David that Joseph "named" the child "Jesus"?

3. The Shepherds' Sign of the Manger

(Luke 2: 1-20)

Q1. (Luke 2:1-2) Why does Luke name the rulers in 2:1-2? What point is he making?

Q2. Why do you think the journey to Bethlehem was difficult for Mary? Is pleasure an indication that we are in God's will or not? Any examples from your life? Extra Credit: Argue for or against this proposition: "Being a consistent Christian causes more hardships than just going with the flow."

Q3. (Luke 2:7-8) Why do you think the message of Jesus' birth comes to shepherds, of all people? Why is Jesus born in a stable with a manger for a bed? This has to be intentional. What point is God making?

Q4. (Luke 2:11) What are the three titles of Jesus given by the angels? What does each mean? What does this tell us about Jesus' true identity?

Q5. (Luke 2:17-20) Great joy, praise, curiosity, amazement, telling others, thoughtful meditation. Which of these responses to the Good News are present in your life? In what manner do they show themselves? If some are missing, why? What can you do to recover these responses?

What are we disciples supposed to get out of this telling of the story of Jesus' birth? Several things:

1. **God brings Good News to the poor and humble.** The shepherds, sometimes despised by their countrymen, were the first recipients of the Good News of Jesus' birth. Since God is no respecter of persons, we aren't to show favoritism either.
2. **The glory of the Lord is powerful and huge.** Just because we don't see it visibly doesn't mean that God isn't active. He often works in quiet ways. Only occasionally does he confirm his presence in miraculous ways.
3. Jesus is the **heir of David.**
4. Jesus is the expected **Savior, Messiah-Master-Lord-God** in our midst.
5. **The Good News is for all people**, Jew and Gentile alike.
6. **Not all people, however, receive God's peace**, but only those whom he has sovereignly chosen.
7. **Appropriate responses to this Good News** include "great joy" (2:10), praise (2:13-14, 20), curiosity to confirm its truth (2:15-16), amazement (2:18), telling others (2:17), and thoughtful meditation (2:19). Nowhere do we see unbelief.

4. Wise Men and the Christmas Star of Bethlehem (Matthew 2: 1-12)

Where did the wise men come from? The text says "the east" (*anatolē*), the direction from which the sun rises. There are three main possibilities:

1. Parthia or Persia.
2. Babylon
3. Arabia or the Syrian desert

What kind of "star" did they see? We don't know for sure. Possibilities include:

1. A supernova or "new star"
2. A comet
3. A planetary conjunction

Q1. (Matthew 2:1-2; Numbers 24:17) What is the significance of the Star of Bethlehem that the Magi saw? Why do you think the Magi came to find the Christ-child when they saw the star? In what way does prophecy prefigure this event?

Q2. (Matthew 2:11a) What do we learn from seeing the Magi prostrating themselves before the child Jesus? What was the significance of this for them? How can we emulate this kind of worship?

Q3. (Matthew 2:11b) Why was it appropriate for the Magi bring gifts to the Christ-child? How does the extravagance of their gifts reflect their heart attitude? What kinds of gifts are appropriate for us to bring?

Q4. Read Matthew 8:5-13; 21:33-44; 22:2-13; 24:14; and 28:19. What do they have in common? What relation does the visit of the wise men have to Matthew's theme of bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles? How should we be applying this mandate in our own lives?

This passage has several themes:

1. The King Heralded by a Star (Numbers 24:17)
2. The King Honored by Foreign Nations (1 Kings 10:2, 10; Psalm 72:10-11, 15; Isaiah 60:5-6, 11)
3. Enemies of Christ Seek His Death (Matthew 27:11, 37; John 18:33-37; 19:19-22)
4. Explanation of Jesus' Infant Sojourns
5. The Gospel to the Gentiles (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 28:14; 49:10; Psalm 22:27; 98:3; Isaiah 49:6; 66:19; Matthew 21:33-44; 22:2-13; 8:5-13; 24:14; Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8)
6. Devotion by Men of Wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:6)
7. The Sovereignty of God