

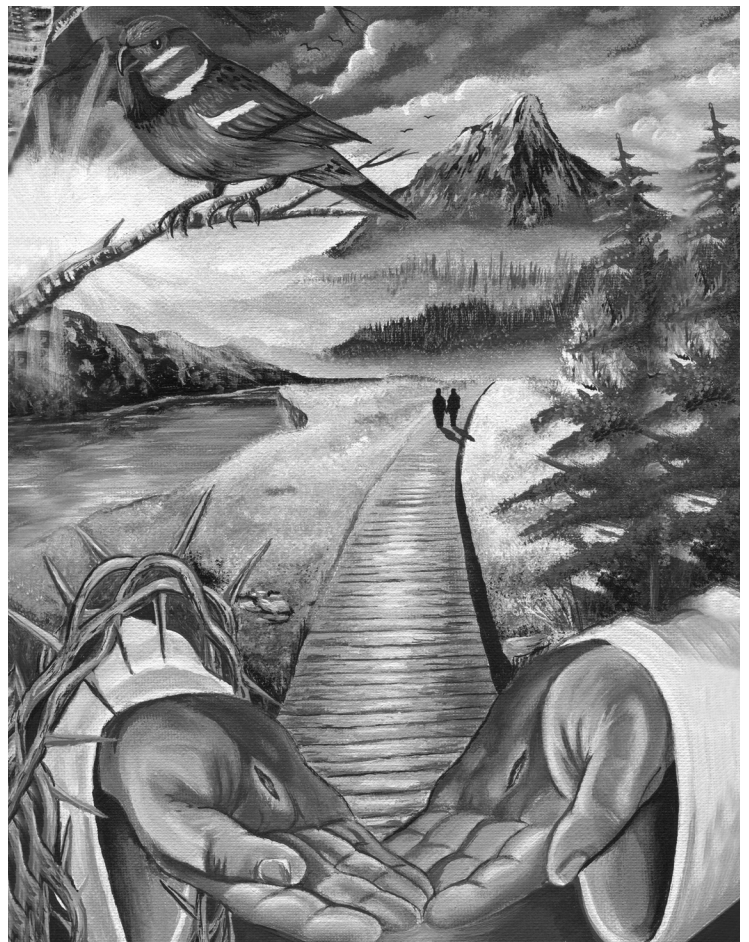


# WHO IS JESUS?

## LESSON 1: A King Is Born

### INTRODUCTION

In this course, you will read about Jesus' life on earth as recorded in the book of Luke. You will learn who Jesus is, what He did, what He taught, and how He saved the world. You will also learn what the story of Jesus' life means for each of us today.



Artwork by Vincent M., former Crossroads student

### Lesson Focus:

**Jesus' birth shows us how He was going to change the world.**

What would you say if someone asked you, "Who is Jesus?" Maybe you have heard people say He was a good man who lived a long time ago. Maybe you have heard people say He was a teacher or a prophet. Maybe you have heard people say He is God. People have many different views of Jesus.

The best way to learn the truth about Jesus is to read about His life. The book of Luke\* in the Bible is a good place to start. It contains many of the earliest true stories about Jesus shared by people who knew Him. They were people God had chosen to be part of His Son's birth and His plan to save the world. God directed Luke to collect these stories and write them down for everyone to read. Luke put them together as one complete book.

The book of Luke was written for people who knew a few things about Jesus but may not have known much about His life or ministry. It was written to help people understand that Jesus was not who God's people\* were expecting Him to be. In fact, Jesus was going to turn their expectations upside down. The people were looking for a military king to fix their day-to-day problems. They had forgotten that God had promised them so much more than that. God had promised that He Himself would come to earth to save them and create a new Kingdom that would last forever. He was going to do that through His Son, Jesus Christ.

\* An asterisk after a word or phrase indicates that it is defined in the Glossary of Terms on page 7.

1. What are some problems people have that they hope God will fix?

## God Makes a Promise

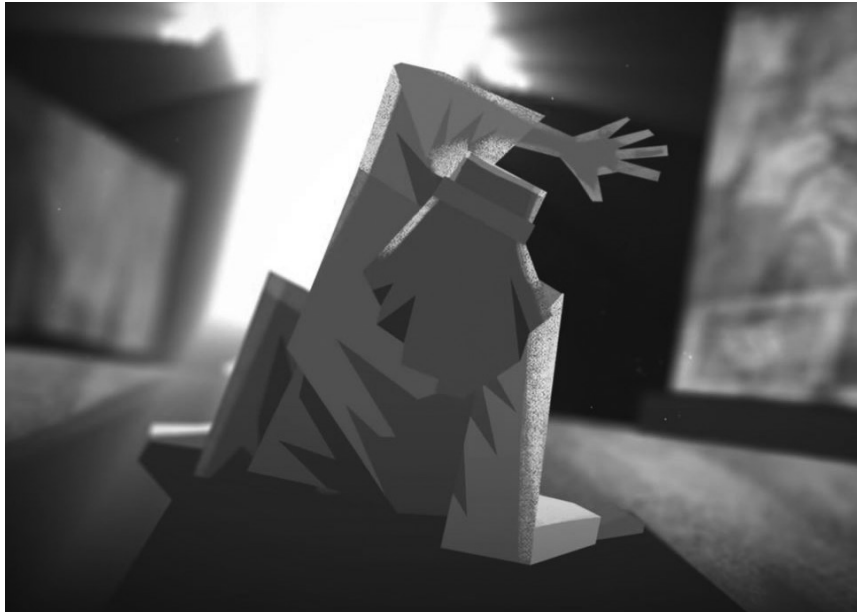
The book of Luke opens with a description of something that happened months before Jesus was born, which took place up in the hills of Jerusalem (jeh-ROU-suh-lehm). Jerusalem was a special city. God had promised that He would someday come to Jerusalem and rule over the whole world from there forever. It was also where God's temple\* was located and where the priests who served Him lived and worked. A man named Zechariah (zeh-kuh-RAI-uh) was one of those priests.

Read **Luke 1:1–25**.

Angels were God's messengers and warriors who defeated God's enemies and protected His people. If an angel showed up to talk to someone in the Bible, it meant that God had an important message for that person.

God sent an angel to tell Zechariah that he and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son. That was shocking news because Zechariah and Elizabeth were very old and had never been able to have children. They had been hoping and praying for a child for a very long time.

2. Have you ever gotten something that you waited a long time for? What did that feel like?



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Notes/Questions

God directed Luke to begin his book with this promise to Zechariah and Elizabeth for a reason. This promise was a lot like the one that God made to a man named Abraham and his wife, Sarah, many years before. God wanted to remind people of what He had done in the past through His promise to Zechariah.

Abraham and Sarah were some of the first people God chose as His followers. Like Zechariah and Elizabeth, they were also very old. They were also unable to have children. But God did something big for Abraham and Sarah. He gave them a son named Isaac.

When God created Abraham and Sarah's new family, He was also creating a whole new nation of people who were called to follow Him. Their son and their family eventually became the nation of Israel, which is talked about often in the Bible. God introduced a new way of life for His people through the birth of Isaac.

God's promise to Zechariah made it clear that God was about to do something big again—through another child. God had used Isaac to announce that He was going to make a new nation. God was going to use Zechariah and Elizabeth's baby to make another announcement to the world.

3. What was God sending Zechariah's son to do for His people (see Luke 1:16–17)?

The angel's message to Zechariah pointed to a promise God had made through Israel's prophets\* hundreds of years earlier. The prophets had said that God would come to earth as a King to rule over His people. As their King, He would bring them peace and create a Kingdom that would last forever. The prophets had also said that God would send someone to get the people ready for His coming—and the angel told Zechariah that his son, John (also known as John the Baptist), would be that person.

In Zechariah's time, Israel was part of the Roman Empire.\* Rome controlled Israel, and they chose a man named Herod (HEHR-ud) to be Israel's king. The Romans picked him to rule over the people of Israel because they knew he would do what they wanted. Herod was a horrible king. He had people killed. He was evil and self-serving. The people of Israel wanted him gone. They wanted Israel to be a great nation again, and they wanted freedom from Rome. They were hoping and praying for a new earthly king.

So, the angel's announcement was shocking not only to Zechariah but to all the people of Israel as well. Everything was about to change! Israel would finally get a new King. But it would not be the king they expected or wanted. God was going to do something entirely new.

4. How does God show His love for us by giving us what we need, not what we want?

## Another Surprising Announcement

The next true story recorded in the book of Luke took place in a small town called Nazareth (NAZ-uh-rehth). It was a town in the middle of nowhere that most people thought of as unimportant. A teenage girl named Mary lived there. She was part of Elizabeth and Zechariah's family, and she was engaged to be married.

Read **Luke 1:26–38**.

God sent an angel to Mary. Like Zechariah, Mary was very surprised to see one of God's messengers. The angel told her that she was also going to have a son, just like her relative Elizabeth was. The angel said she should name Him Jesus, a name that means "the Lord saves." He told her that her son would save God's people from their sins and rule over them forever.

Mary was confused. She was still a virgin! How could she have a baby? It did not make sense. But the angel told her, "The Holy Spirit will come to you. The power of the Most High God will cover you. So the holy one that is born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

Mary's son would become a great King—but He would be even more than that. He would also be God's own Son.



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5. What are some other things we can learn about who Jesus is from God's message to Mary (see Luke 1:30–37)?

6. What do you think it would be like to receive such an important and surprising message from God?

Very few people who knew Mary would have thought she was important. But God was going to use her to be part of His plan to send His Son to earth. That was completely unexpected. But it pointed to what God was planning to do through Jesus' time on earth. God was going to turn the way the world worked upside down.

Jesus was not coming to act like a normal king. He was not going to gather wealth, defeat enemy armies, or build a big castle for



Notes/Questions

Himself. He was going to sacrifice\* Himself for everyone. He was going to care for the poor, feed the hungry, and heal the brokenhearted.

In response to everything she heard from the angel, Mary sang a song praising God. In her song, she listed many things God had done in the past. Her song pointed to what God would do in the future. God guided Luke to write it down so we could read her words.

Read **Luke 1:39–56**.

7. What did Mary remember that God had done for humble and hungry people in the past (see Luke 1:51–53)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. How can remembering the things God has done in the past give us strength to face the future?

## The King Is Born

Just as the angel said, Mary became pregnant. Around the time when Mary was ready to give birth, the Romans made a new law. Everyone who lived in the Roman Empire had to go to their hometown to be counted by the government. So, Mary and Joseph, the man she was engaged to, had to travel to Bethlehem (BEHTH-leh-hehm). It was a long way from Nazareth, and they had to travel there on foot. They had no other choice.

Read **Luke 2:1–20**.

When Mary and Joseph finally reached Bethlehem, they had trouble finding a place to stay. There were so many visitors in town that they could not find a guest room. The only place they could find to stay was a place where animals slept.

That was where Mary had her baby. She gave birth to Jesus. She laid him in a feeding box for animals—an unusual bed for a King. God's Son was born in one of the most unexpected places.

9. What would you expect to happen when a king is born? Who would be there? Where would it take place?

God was not done surprising His people. That night, God sent His angel army to announce the birth of His Son to a group of shepherds in a field.

10. In your own words, what did the angel tell the shepherds (see Luke 2:9–12)?

Shepherds were not considered to be important people. They were usually young boys, young girls, and old men—people who were not able to do hard physical work. They were often poor and spent most of their time with their animals in the hills. Even though they had a low position in society, God chose them as the first people to hear about the birth of Jesus.

The angel told the shepherds that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem and that they should go and find this baby. The angel said that Jesus was the Messiah\* (meh-SAI-uh), the King they had been waiting for, who would bring peace and hope to everyone. The shepherds did as the angel told them. They went and found the newborn King lying in an animal feeding box. They were surprised and confused. They wondered how this tiny child was going to bring peace to the world, but they began spreading the good news that the angel had given them.

11. Why do you think God planned Jesus' birth to happen the way it did?

## A Different Kind of Kingdom

In all these events, nothing happened the way people expected—and that is the point. God's Kingdom first showed up in unexpected places. People that seemed poor and unimportant to everyone around them were included in Jesus' birth. That was because Jesus had come to bring salvation to *everyone* and to show the world what was truly important to God.

Jesus was going to rule the world and save God's people, but not the way most people thought. He was not going to begin His rule by claiming the right to Herod's throne or destroying the Roman Empire. Instead, He was going to show people how to love their enemies and how to follow God by putting others first. He was going to die to pay for the sins of the whole world. He was going to be the King of a different kind of Kingdom.

12. The book of Luke shows us that God does not do things the way people expect. How did God surprise the following people in the passages you read?

Zechariah:

Mary:

The shepherds:

13. How has God surprised you through this lesson or in the past?

## Action Step

In the passages you read in this lesson, God surprised people with messages of hope that changed their lives. Find a way to give some hope or encouragement to someone around you today. If you are not sure what to do, ask God for inspiration. Write down what you did and what happened as a result:

## Glossary of Terms

**Each lesson contains Bible names, terms, and ideas that may be new to you. We will do our best to provide definitions that are easy to understand. You will see an asterisk (\*) the first time each term appears in the lesson.**

**Book of Luke** – One of four books of the Bible written about Jesus' life. It was written for people who were not from Israel, called Gentiles.

**Empire** – A group of territories or countries under one ruler. In Jesus' time, Rome ruled over all the countries around the Mediterranean Sea, including Israel. These countries were all part of the Roman Empire.

**God's people** – Anyone who decides to follow God. Throughout most of the Bible, this phrase is used only to describe the people of Israel, which is the nation God created from Abraham's family. The parts of the Bible written after Jesus came to earth promise that anyone can become part of God's people through faith in Jesus Christ.

**Messiah** – "The anointed one." When Israel first became a kingdom, its kings were anointed—meaning they had oil poured on their heads—when they took power. God promised through the prophets (see "**prophet**") that a Messiah would come to earth, be anointed as King, and rule over Israel forever (2 Samuel 7:12–13; Daniel 7:13–14).

**Prophet** – Someone who brought messages from God to His people (see "**God's people**"). Many books of the Bible were written by prophets (for example, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea). These books contain many promises God made to His people that came true years later.

**Sacrifice** – To give something to God. For many years, the people of Israel sacrificed animals in the temple (see "**temple**") as a way to receive forgiveness from God. Jesus later became the final sacrifice, making all other forms of sacrifice unnecessary.

**Temple** – The place where the people of Israel worshiped God. The temple was a beautiful building in the middle of the city of Jerusalem. It was special because God's people (see "**God's people**") could meet with Him there and be in His presence.

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