



FREE LESSON · SHARE FREELY

A CHRISTMAS LESSON · AGES 8-12

The Manger

On the night Jesus was born, an angel brought the news to shepherds out in a field. They ran to find him. Then they told everyone.



GRATITUDE · A CHRISTMAS LESSON

A QUICK NOTE TO PARENTS

Before you read together

At Christmas, children see the story of Jesus' birth on cards, in songs and in church programs. They can know the pictures well and still miss the story. This lesson slows it down. It stays with the plain account in Luke 2:1–20: a trip to Bethlehem, no room at the inn, a baby laid in a manger, and a field of shepherds who heard the news that night.

The virtue here is **gratitude, the kind that speaks up**. Watch what the shepherds do. They hear the news, go to see it, find it true, tell everyone, and go back to work praising God. Christmas can easily become a season about getting. This story points a child to a gift that has already been given, and shows what people do when they finally see it.

WHAT IT TEACHES

Gratitude that speaks up. The shepherds *heard, went, saw, told* and *praised*. A child can remember all five.

HOW TO USE IT

Read the story aloud. Pause after the angel's message and ask: *who would you have expected God to tell first?* Then read on to the end. About 20 minutes with the questions.

A NOTE ON THE SOURCE

This lesson retells Luke 2:1–20 in plain words and quotes The Living Bible (TLB). We have kept to what the text says. Luke's account does not mention a donkey or an innkeeper who speaks, and neither Luke nor Matthew gives the day or the month of Jesus' birth. The wise men appear in Matthew's account of Jesus' birth, not Luke's. Matthew says they found the child in a house (Matthew 2:11) and names three gifts, but never says how many visitors came. Those extra details are fine in a Christmas play. We have left them out so your child meets the story as it is written.

HERE IS A STORY WORTH KEEPING. READ IT SLOWLY.

A night outside Bethlehem

A long time ago, the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, ordered a count of all the people. Everyone had to go back to the town their family came from and put their name on the list.

Joseph lived in the village of Nazareth, in Galilee. But his family came from King David's line, and David's old hometown was Bethlehem, in Judea. So Joseph made the trip to Bethlehem, and Mary went with him. She was engaged to Joseph, and she was going to have a baby.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born. Luke tells it in one plain sentence: "She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the village inn." (Luke 2:7, TLB) A manger is a feeding box for animals. That is where they laid the baby Jesus.

Out in the fields near the village, some shepherds were awake, guarding their sheep in the dark. Suddenly an angel appeared among them, and the whole countryside shone with the glory of the Lord. The shepherds were terrified. But the angel spoke to them:

"Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you the most joyful news ever announced, and it is for everyone! The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born tonight in Bethlehem! How will you recognize him? You will find a baby wrapped in a blanket, lying in a manger!" (Luke 2:10–12, TLB)

Then the angel was joined by a huge crowd of others, the armies of heaven, all praising God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven," they sang, "and peace on earth for all those pleasing him." (Luke 2:14, TLB)

When the angels had gone back to heaven, the shepherds turned to each other. "Come on! Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this wonderful thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." (Luke 2:15, TLB)

They ran to the village. They found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger, just as the angel had said.

They had heard the news. Now they had seen it with their own eyes. And they could not keep it to themselves.

WHAT THE STORY IS REALLY ABOUT

Good news is for telling

Luke says what the shepherds did next: “The shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child.” (Luke 2:17, TLB) Everyone who heard them was amazed. Then the shepherds went back to their fields and their sheep, praising God because they had seen the child, just as the angel had told them.

Nothing about their work had changed. They were still shepherds, going back to the same sheep. But they went back praising God.

THE QUIET ONE

Not everyone in the story was loud. “Mary quietly treasured these things in her heart and often thought about them.” (Luke 2:19, TLB) She kept every piece of that night: the shepherds’ story, the angel’s words, the manger. Gratitude has a quiet side too. It means remembering what God has done, on purpose, so you do not forget it.

GOD CAME SMALL

The Savior was not born in a palace. His bed that night was a feeding box, and the first people Luke tells us were invited to see him were shepherds from a nearby field. God could have announced it anywhere. He announced it to working people out in a field at night. Nobody is too ordinary for this news.

FIVE VERBS

Look at what the shepherds did. They heard the news. They went to see. They found it true. They told everyone. They went home praising God. *Heard, went, saw, told, praised.* A child can do every one of those this week.

Luke never says the shepherds took anything home from Bethlehem. The root of gratitude is **remembering what God has given, and saying so out loud.**

TALK IT OVER

Three questions, no wrong answers

1. God could have sent the news to a palace. Instead the angel went to shepherds out in a field at night, and the baby was lying in a manger, a feeding box for animals. Why do you think God chose to come so small and so quietly? What does that tell you about who God notices?

2. The shepherds did not wait. They said, “*Come on! Let’s go to Bethlehem!*” and they ran. Then they told everyone. When you get really good news, who is the first person you want to tell? Why is good news so hard to keep to yourself?

3. The shepherds went home praising God out loud. Mary kept thinking about it quietly. Which one are you more like? What is one good thing God has done for your family that you could thank him for, out loud, this week?

ONE THING TO TRY THIS WEEK: BE A SHEPHERD

Sometime this week, have your child tell the Christmas story from Luke 2 in their own words to someone who was not here for this lesson: a grandparent on the phone, a younger brother or sister, a cousin. Use the five verbs as the outline: *heard, went, saw, told, praised*. Then end the way the shepherds did. Each of you names one thing you thank God for, out loud.

COPYWORK

Copy the line below in your best handwriting. Words worth keeping.

“I bring you the most joyful news ever announced, and it is for everyone!”

— LUKE 2:10 (TLB)

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WHERE THE TRAIL GOES NEXT

From the manger to the road

The baby in the manger grew up. Years later, when a man asked him who counts as a neighbor, Jesus answered with a story about a traveler beaten and left beside a road, and a stranger who stopped to help him. That story is [The Good Samaritan](#) (Luke 10), and it is another free lesson on the trail.

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Each one is a story, the root under it, three questions and a practice for the week.

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