

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Highlight the world’s understanding of what power is and how it should be applied.
- Compare the world’s understanding of how to use power with God’s usage of power in today’s story.
- Note how God’s invitation to the shepherds to share a message transforms them

Materials needed:

1. Movie clip (available on rfour.org) from *The Devil Wears Prada*
2. Electronics that show the video clip
3. Cards with letters written on them (for hand anagrams activity). Need the letters of L, A, T, E, S, T – plan to have a set of cards for every 3 students. If you have 5 students, you’ll only need one set of cards, but if you have 6, have 2 sets, and so on.

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- One of the things we do every class is ask and answer the opening question at the beginning of class – because it helps us 1. Learn more about each other and 2. Helps “warm us up” for some of the ideas in the upcoming lesson. So we’re going to do that now.
- So here’s the opening question for today’s class. I [the teacher] will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we’ll go around the circle and each of us will answer.
- When it’s your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- **Here’s this week’s question:** What is a message, recently, that you somehow passed along from one person to another person?

TRANSITION TO Video Clip

- This lesson begins a session about significant starting points in Jesus’ life.
- One significant starting point in Jesus’ life was ... the start of his life -- which we’ll read about and discuss today.
- To begin, let’s talk a little bit about power.
- There’s many different types of power.

- The power I want us to think about is when a person with power is in the room, the other people act differently in that person's presence than they normally would act.
- The people act differently because they want some of what the person with power can give them.
- To help us think about what this might look like, let's watch the following video clip from the movie, "The Devil Wears Prada" – in it, we are introduced to the editor-in-chief of a fashion magazine, who is a very well-known person in the fashion industry.
- Her opinion is highly regarded and can make or break careers.
- In other words, she has a lot of power.
- Let's see how people respond to her.

WATCH Video clip

ASK

- Did the employees act differently once the boss was in the office? (yes)
- How? (they moved quicker; all their words and actions revolved around the boss)
- Do you think the employees were afraid of the boss? (yes)
- Was the boss nice to them? (no)
- Did the boss get away with not being nice to the employees? (yes)
- Any thoughts on why the boss could get away with that way of treating people? (usually it's because the employees want to keep their jobs)
- Did the person interviewing for the job also accept the rudeness from the boss? (Mostly; but did speak up at one point)

TELL

- What we see in the movie clip is a boss who says, "Do this thing" and then that thing gets done.
- We also see that the boss doesn't really care what is required in order to "get the thing done." All the boss cares about is that the it gets done.
- This is a pretty common understanding of power: When you're in power, people will do what you tell them to do.
- In today's scripture story, we will see how Rome has a similar type of power and uses it similarly as the boss in the movie clip.
- Jesus' birth place is unusual because of Rome.
- But, we'll also see (and then compare) how God understands power differently than Rome.
- Let's see what happens

READ Luke 2:1-20 (recommendation: Have class read it aloud; one person per verse)

2In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3All went to their own towns to be registered. 4Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house

and family of David. 5He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,
14“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

ASK

- Verse 1 – who is making a decree? (Emperor Augustus)
- Verse 3 – Where did the people have to then go? (their home towns)
 - a) Just to be clear, what’s happening here is that Rome told all the people that they were to travel to their ancestor’s hometown so that they could be counted.
- Verse 4 – Where does Joseph start and where does he go? (Nazareth to Bethlehem is about 60 miles which is about three days of travel – or 20 miles a day of walking)
- Verse 5 – Who went with Joseph? (Mary)
- And what medical condition is Mary in? (She’s very pregnant! And walking 60 miles)
- Verse 6 - What does Mary do while in Bethlehem? (She gives birth to Jesus)
- Verse 7 - Where does Mary give birth to Jesus? (wherever the manger is – which is a large animal feeding trough – so some kind of a barn-like place)
- Why is Jesus born there? (because there was no place for them to stay)
- Does this seem like a good or nice thing? (no)
- Verses 9-14: Who do the angels talk and sing to? (the shepherds)
- What do the angels tell the shepherds? (that an important child has been born and where they can find him and then they sing praises)
- Just to be clear: Do the angels ever command the shepherds to find Jesus? (Nope, instead they invite)
- Verse 15 – what do the shepherds decide to do about this invitation? (They decide to go find the baby)
- Verse 17 – 20: What do the shepherds do after they find baby Jesus? (they go and tell lots of people and then they praise God – overall, they seem pretty excited about the situation)

TELL

- What I like about this story is the contrast between the normal way that powerful people function vs how God

functions.

- First, let's look at what Rome does in the story
 - a) Rome wants to count its people so that it can tax them more (that's the reason for the census)
 - b) Rome makes a decree which forces the people to move around so that they can be more easily counted
 - c) The result is that none of this is convenient or beneficial or optional to the people under Roman rule; it is a burden
- Second, let's look at what God does in the story
 - a) God lets Jesus be born in a stable instead of forcing other people to make room for Mary and Joseph.
 - b) God informs the shepherds of what has happened, offering them an invitation instead of making a decree.
 - c) The result is that the shepherds are excited about what's happening and are happy to participate in the moment. They willingly find Jesus, willingly tell other people, and then willingly praise God.
- In conclusion, we see that when Rome uses its power, it does so for its own betterment and does not care what the people experience.
- But, we also see that when God uses God's power, God does so in a way that invites betterment of the people involved, should they accept the invitation.
- That shepherds were invited to participate whatsoever is pretty amazing in fact.
- Since they were gone for long periods of time, had to work the night shift, smelled bad, and didn't get paid well – the shepherds were not highly regarded people.
- And yet, God tells them first. God tells them first and then invites them to experience the moment before anyone else.
- And, because God tells them first and because the shepherds accept the invitation, the shepherds are changed.
- They go from being last in society to being the first to know about Jesus
- And, because they have been given a message to share, they move from their usual place in society (as outsiders located outside of town) and become insiders who help everyone else hear and know about Jesus' birth.

EXPLAIN ACTIVITY

- To help us think about how being given a message can move *and* change the messenger, we're going to do a simple activity that was once known as "spell my feet."
- But we'll call it "hand anagrams"
- To get started, we're going to need 6 hands (not feet)
- We might need to have more than 1 team -- every team should be between 3 and 6 people
- If there are three people on a team, then each person gets one letter per hand.
- If there are more than 3 people on a team, then the one or more teammates who only have one letter should hold their one letter with both hands
- Note: the fewer people per team the more difficult and goofy the activity becomes
- Now I need you to stand in a line with your teammates, side-by-side, shoulder-to-shoulder.
- I'm going to come by and hand you your letter or letters
- And if you hold all the letters up for me to see – ah yes, look at that! They spell a word – they spell "Lattes" mmmm
- Now, I'm going to call out another word, and your job is to spell it with the letters you have.
- To spell it, you canNOT trade letters with others or between your two hands and you canNOT move your feet.
- And, remember, if you only have one card, you have to hold it with both hands at all times!
- Let's see how much these new words stretch and change you!?

- If there are teams, we'll see who can spell each word the fastest without breaking the rules I just mentioned.
- Any questions?

Notes to teachers:

1. When spelling words with five letters, the people holding the unused sixth letter can simply hold that card down against their leg
2. Remind them that they have to spell the word starting at the reader's left and going to the reader's right.
3. If there's only one team, time how long it takes for them to get each word spelled out
4. It might not be a bad idea to have a camera ready to take a picture or two

DO ACTIVITY

Other words to spell in activity

- least
- slate
- steal
- taste
- latest

TELL

- Well done, everyone!
- This was meant to be a light-hearted activity to show how your situation and position and feeling all changed as you attempted to repeat words (or the *message*, even) that you were given.
- In today's story, we saw the same thing happen with the shepherds.
- The world had given them a message that they were the *least* – a word you spelled out by the way
- But then, God gave them the *latest* and greatest message to share.
- And, because the shepherds were invited to share that latest and greatest message – their position of “least” was changed.
- Sharing that message changed where they were (from outsiders to insiders) and it changed how they were positioned (from “last to know” to “first to know”).
- One of the main reasons I think God told the shepherds first was not ONLY to have them experience this change, but also to remind all of us that this message of Jesus' birth is meant for all of us – including who the world tends to deem as outsiders and the least of us.
- And that's the good news for today.

CLOSING PRAYER