



OVERVIEW SECTION

How to Read This Lesson Plan

The **Overview Section** is the foundation of this lesson plan. The questions and activities for the class that you will be teaching on Sunday morning have been based (sometimes loosely) upon what you read in this section. The **Overview Section** is composed of five components (each component is underlined in the lesson plan):

- How to Read This Lesson Plan** (defines all components of the lesson plan)
- Purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation** (a reminder of why we do this)
- Scripture(s) for the Session** (a reminder that the scripture is to be read in every class)
- Key Verses & Theology** (background for teachers to ponder)
- Themes to Focus on from the Scripture** (the ideas that the session's lessons are based on)

The actual lesson is found in the second section, **The Sunday Morning Experience Section**. Think of this section as the step-by-step instruction guide to your Sunday morning teaching experience. There are four components to this section (again, each component is underlined in the actual lesson plan):

- Preparation** (including supplies needed)
- Classroom Statement** (a brief explanation of what will be taught/happening in the classroom)
- Step-by-step process of the lesson** (including the scripture to be read)
- Suggested variations for age groups** (Self-explanatory but not always applicable)

We encourage you to read the rest of this **Overview Section** before reading the **Sunday Morning Experience Section**.

Purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation

The purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation is, with God's help and in community, to hear and interact with the stories of our faith tradition, to pray, worship and play together, and to equip and support the building of relationships with God and with each other.

Scripture(s) for the Session: Luke 2:8-20; Luke 3:23-38 (abridged)

Please READ this aloud in every class you teach. The actual words to the scripture can be found in **The Sunday Morning Experience Section: Step-by-Step process of the lesson**. When reading to the class, please read it from the lesson plan (not an actual Bible) as the wording of the scripture has been modified to help clarify some language issues.

Key Verses & Theology: These are provided to help the teachers think about and build a framework for understanding the story to help in answering some of the questions that the students might raise in class.

Luke 3:23-38: 23 Jesus was the son of 38 son of Enos, son of Seth, son of Adam, son of God. So does God like or love Jesus more than other babies? More than you or me? Is Jesus different/special because of nepotism? The genealogy of Luke says, “No.” Luke’s genealogy does not just name Jesus as the son of God, but all those who came before him. And if Adam was the son of God, and we accept Adam as our first ancestor (in whatever form he takes), then we too are sons and daughters of God. If we agree to this reading/understanding of Luke’s genealogy, then it changes our reading of other parts of the Jesus story.

2:10But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people... The Good News can be startling and is often prefaced with the words, “Do not be afraid.” And what is the Good News in this case? That a child is born. Traditional theology based on the Jesus birth narratives of Luke and Matthew tell us that Jesus’ birth was a special occasion and that this special birth therefore made Jesus who Jesus was. But another way to understand the birth narrative is to think that *how* Jesus chose to live his life then made his birth, in retrospect, special.

For those of us who have experienced personally or through someone close to us the birth of a child, we know that every birth is good news: A child, my child, our child, my friend’s child has been born. And to think that each birth represents another opportunity for the world to be different, another gift of God given to the world to turn back to God – that is indeed Good news: A child is born.

2:15When 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.” 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. Announcing a birth with style helps, doesn’t it? A child born in a barn and lying in a manger isn’t usually enough to get shepherds or anyone else of this world to stop and take notice. A kid born in a barn is just another kid born into limited resources, with the odds stacked against him/her. But a multitude of angels...that’ll get at least someone’s attention. And it does. The shepherds listen enough that they go into town: Not a common choice for shepherds, especially when they’re leaving the sheep less guarded (most likely they left a remnant of shepherds behind to watch over the sheep). But what if every child were welcomed into the world this way? What if every time a child was born, parts/aspects of the world would stop and go welcome that child? It certainly would cause a mother to “ponder all these things in her heart.” And who knows how that pondering would then affect parenting choices made over the years...?

Themes to Focus on from the Scripture: Themes are provided to help teachers understand the teaching of the *session* (not necessarily the class). Sometimes an activity in one class may not match up with any of the themes.

Belonging: As humans, a need that we have is to belong. Often we associate this sense of belonging with those who care for us, provide for us, for instance, like parents. In the Christmas story, God is portrayed as Jesus' parent. Jesus belongs to God. And that's important. But what sometimes gets overlooked is that God is our parent too. We too are God's sons and daughters. None of us is alone. None of us is an orphan.

Identity: Who we think we are often comes from who we think we belong to. The Good news is that we belong to God. If we trust that we are God's son or daughter, then we can more fully receive what God has to offer us, thus helping us to become more of who we are – God's child. Jesus embodies who we are and what we can do when we fully receive what God has to offer us.

Sharing: Once we believe we've been given something good, we want others to know the goodness of what we've received. Seen a good movie, listened to a good song, read a good book? Then what do you do? You go share it with someone! The shepherds do the same thing. They share the excitement of a child being born. And this excitement is contagious. And how exciting is it that each of us is God's beloved daughter/son? Looking at the Jesus story, we can see what is available to us to share when we live into the truth of being God's child.



THE SUNDAY MORNING EXPERIENCE SECTION

Preparation

- Print out this lesson plan and bring it with you on the Sunday Mornings you are teaching
- Arrive at pre-arranged time to join other teachers, shepherds and staff for an opening prayer.
- Supplies Needed: Story of Jesus' birth as told by Mary; costume to dress up as Mary; pictures for first activity; cards with scenes written out on them for second activity.

Classroom Statement

This Storytelling class consists of telling the story of Jesus' birth from the perspective of Mary. It also has two activities that help the students to commit the story to memory. The first activity is taking pictures from the story and putting them in the correct sequence. The second activity is a "freeze-frame" activity, where the students strike a pose from the story and the rest of the class has to guess what scene from the story is being displayed.

Step-by-Step Process of Lesson

Shepherd comes in with students

SHEPHERD ASKS "Question of the Day."

INTRODUCE yourself

Hi, my name is ____ and I want you call me (tell the students how they may address you).

PRAY (Short and simple is perfect)

God, thank you for this day and for each other. We need your help. Help us to learn about you this day. Amen.

TELL

- Today, we're going to hear the story of Jesus' birth from his mother, Mary. It's written down in the form of a letter.

READ the script

Dear Jesus, your father, Joseph, and I want you to remember how things started for you. So we're asking a priest to write this down for us since we can't read and write very well.

Things started getting interesting about 10 months ago. My family and Joseph's family were getting ready to have a wedding party for Joseph and me. I was thankful that my parents and Joseph's parents chose to marry Joseph and I because I really liked Joseph. I tell you this because a lot of my friends were being married to men they didn't like at all.

But then a strange thing happened. A messenger of God came to me and told me that I was pregnant. But I didn't *feel* pregnant. But the angel told me that I was pregnant and that I was to call the child, Jesus. The name Jesus means, "God saves." The angel told me that Jesus was going to be a great man for the people of Israel, the Messiah (which means anointed one)! So this is exciting and scary news for me. And what's even scarier is that I need to tell Joseph. He's not going to like hearing that I'm having a child even though he and I are not yet married.

So I tell Joseph. And he IS angry. He doesn't believe me. But he says he'll think about what to do. If he doesn't choose to marry me, if instead he chooses to call off the wedding, people will ask why. And he'll probably say it is because I'm pregnant. And then if the townspeople get really upset (which sometimes they do), then they might kill me by stoning me. I'm very afraid that night after I tell Joseph. What's he going to do?

He comes to me the next day and tells me that though he doesn't understand it all, he knows that he is to marry me and that if I am pregnant, that he will name the boy Jesus and raise him as his own son. I am so happy and relieved! Our wedding plans continue on and we get married soon after.

A number of months later, the Roman Emperor says everyone must be counted, so that the Romans can tax us better. And in order for us to be counted, we have to travel to our ancestor's hometown. Well, for Joseph, this means we need to go to Bethlehem. That's over 60 miles by foot! And I'm so pregnant, I can hardly walk! But Joseph borrows a donkey from a family member and I ride to Bethlehem on the donkey. We cover about 10 miles a day. It takes us a week to get to Bethlehem. We're late because it took us so long. And I am exhausted. But there's no place to stay. All the places were filled up days ago. I can feel contractions starting – I think baby Jesus is ready to be born, but where? Where will I give birth to him?

Joseph is frantically searching for a place for us to rest. Finally, one innkeeper tells us we can stay in the barn out back. We go out there with all the other animals, and during the course of the night, you, my wonderful and beautiful baby Jesus, are born. Joseph helps out, which the men usually don't do, but he is so very gentle with you and cradles you in his arms and sings to you. Then we wrap you up with some blankets and lay you down in the animals' feeding trough. You looked so cute and cozy in there. We're all exhausted and fall asleep.

A few hours later we awake to the sounds of men walking to the barn. They are loud and sound a little lost. Joseph and I are worried about what they will do if they find us out here. We huddle together in a corner.

Then the barn door opens and all these smelly men come in. They have torches and are smiling widely. One of the men comes over to the feeding trough and sees you, baby Jesus. The man throws

his hands in the air and yells, "It's TRUE! He's here!" And then they all coming rushing over to you, Jesus. They fall to their knees and are praying outloud, saying, "Thank you God for bringing us here. Thank you God for this child. Thank you thank you thank you."

Then one of the men comes over to Joseph and me and tells me about angels in the field telling them to come find a baby in a barn, wrapped in cloths, lying in a animal food trough. He brings Joseph and me over to you and says to all of us, "This baby will grow into a man who will then help us to know God and live God's way better. Let us give thanks to God."

Then they are so excited, they go out and tell anyone and everyone what they had heard and seen. Some of the more curious people came that night to see us too. One man took compassion on us and let us stay in their place until I was ready to travel again.

It was quite the first day for you, Jesus. And I will remember it for as long as I live. I love you.

Your mother,
Mary

EXPLAIN activity

- There were a lot of things that happened in that story, weren't there?
- To help us remember all those things, we're going to use some pictures from the story and put them in order of how the story was told.
- Sounds pretty easy, right?
- But wait! There's a catch.
- First, I need everyone to line up on stage.
- Now, from now on, no one can say ANYTHING!
- [Give each student a picture. If there are more pictures than students, it's ok to leave out a few of the less important pictures. If you have more students than pictures, put the class into pairs and give each pair a picture]
- Now from left to right, you have to line up according to when you think the picture took place in the story.
- REMEMBER, YOU MAY NOT TALK to anyone.
- GO!

DO activity

TELL

- For our next activity, you'll need to have a partner.
- Now that you all have a partner, I'm going to come around and give you a scene from the story.
- Your challenge is to figure out how to show this scene with your bodies. But you're not acting the scene out, instead you are going to act like a real-life PICTURE of the story.
- I'm going to give you 3 minutes to discuss and practice with your partner how you are going to show your scene to the class.
- [Wait 3 minutes – and help out where needed]

- OK, I need everyone to sit down and face the stage.
- I'm going to call each of you up as a pair to show to the class your real-life picture from the story.
- The rest of us will guess what part of the story you are showing us a picture of.
- [Call up a pair, have them show you their "real-life picture", have the rest of the class guess]
- Very good! Everyone clap for a job well done!
- Now, who's next?

CLEAN UP

DISMISS FOR SINGING

List of scenes to act out in "Still Frame"

The angel tells Mary that she will have a baby boy.

Mary tells Joseph that she is pregnant

Mary and Joseph get married

Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem

There is no room in the Inn for Mary and Joseph

Baby Jesus is born

The angels tell the shepherds

The shepherds come to see Jesus.

The shepherds go tell others.