



“This is the Story...”

Written by Talashia Keim Yoder and Daniel Yoder. Artwork by Christa and Jonathan Reuel.

Week 30

Luke 2:6-20

Review the big story: God created the cosmos and humans and called it all good. We were created to live in harmony, but sometimes we miss the mark. All of humanity missed the mark, and they had to live with the consequences, but God stuck with them and continued to love them. Then God called a family to be a blessing to the whole earth. Like the humans before them, the generations of this family often missed the mark, but God was faithful.

When the people became slaves in Egypt, God raised up Moses to be their leader. God performed many signs and wonders, and delivered them from slavery. In the wilderness, they learned to be a people of God, trusting in God’s provision, living out God’s commandments, and wrestling with the law in shalom community. As they prepared to go into the promised land, they were given the *shema*, words of love to keep with their whole beings. Through miraculous works, God brought the people into the promised land. Once there, they had to learn again how to be God’s people. They missed the mark a lot, and God sent judges to guide them. Ordinary people showed creativity and steadfast love in the way they continued the story of the people of God.

When the people demanded a king, God sent prophets like Samuel to try to keep the people faithful to God. Kings Saul, David and Solomon continued to miss the mark, and the kingdom divided into the north (Israel) and south (Judah). God stuck with the people through leaders and prophets, and continued to call the people back to God, even as first the northern, and then the southern kingdom fell to invading powers. Some of the people were sent into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the kingdom. Through prophets and everyday people, God continued to stick with the scattered people and to reveal that God is so much bigger than they imagined. The people were finally able to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple. Through all the turmoil, prophets like Isaiah brought comfort to the people.

As we begin the story of the New Testament, Rome is the power in charge and the people of God are waiting for a Messiah. This Messiah is announced, first with a surprising genealogy, then through an angel to Mary. Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem to participate in the census.

- **Key verses:** Luke 2:7; Luke 2:14; Luke 2:19

Tell the story: While they were in Bethlehem, it was time for the baby to be born. Jesus was born, swaddled, and had a manger for his first bed. He had special visitors - shepherds who came to see the baby Messiah after a host of angels announced his birth to them. The savior came into the world as a helpless baby, born into arms of love.

- Read Luke 2:6-20
- Read pages 165-167 in the *Shine On* story Bible.

Prime the pump:

- **Things to notice:**

- Last week we noted that the story doesn't mention a donkey. Are there other things you remember from the story that you don't find here? Every culture puts its own spin on the story. For example, check out the French addition to the nativity scene - look up "cagner."
- Shepherds often appear in scripture as a positive image. Where else do you remember shepherds from the big story?
- Notice the different names given for Jesus in verse 11. Why do you think all of these are used?

- **Background information:**

- Have you ever wondered why Jesus is specifically called Mary's "firstborn"? The original readers would have understood that this meant he was dedicated to God. It would also have sparked a memory for them of Israel as God's "firstborn son" (Exodus 4:22).
- "Bands of cloth" would be like swaddling a baby today. Some say it also foreshadows Jesus being wrapped in bands of cloth for burial.
- A "manger" is a feeding trough for animals. This is the clue that we use to deduce that Jesus was born in an area that included animals. The article referenced under "conversation starters" can tell you a little more about what that probably meant, but in short, Jesus was probably born in a home instead of in an area reserved for guests. The word translated as "inn" in verse 7 is elsewhere translated as "guest room" (Luke 22:11). Another interesting tidbit: some say that this reference to a feeding vessel anticipates the Last Supper.

- **Conversation starters:**

- We make a lot of Western assumptions on this story. It's an imagination-sparking story, and it's perfectly okay to try to imagine it! But it may also be good to learn a little bit about the culture Jesus was born into. This article (https://sarahbessey.substack.com/p/why-everything-you-know-about-the?fbclid=IwAR0I_EZNMV4V5AphJVosn0JgwrJCN-NSNgfUplc1CXbrHfRkop_S8IXEeY) makes an interesting case for a less-lonely nativity story.
- The Greek word translated as "the Lord" in verse 7 is *kyrios*, which is also used consistently in the Septuigent (Greek translation of the Old Testament) to translate YHWH (the name God answers Moses with at the burning bush). What does it mean for Jesus to be proclaimed this way? Who is Jesus???



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Week 31

Luke 2:21-38

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When the people became slaves in Egypt, God raised up Moses to be their leader. God performed many signs and wonders, and delivered them from slavery. In the wilderness, they learned to be a people of God, trusting in God's provision, living out God's commandments, and wrestling with the law in shalom community. As they prepared to go into the promised land, they were given the *shema*, words of love to keep with their whole beings. Through miraculous works, God brought the people into the promised land. Once there, they had to learn again how to be God's people. They missed the mark a lot, and God sent judges to guide them. Ordinary people showed creativity and steadfast love in the way they continued the story of the people of God.

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As we begin the story of the New Testament, Rome is the power in charge and the people of God are waiting for a Messiah. This Messiah is announced, first with a surprising genealogy, then through an angel to Mary. Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem, and there, Jesus was born, proclaimed by angels and visited by shepherds.

- **Key verse:** Luke 2:30-31; Luke 2:34-35; Luke 2:38

Tell the story: According to Hebrew law, Jesus needed to be circumcised when he was eight days old, and presented to God at the temple. At the temple, a devout, elderly man named Simeon came and recognized Jesus as the Messiah, holding him and proclaiming him. An elderly prophet, Anna, also came to the temple, and she too recognized Jesus and began to proclaim him to others.

- Read Luke 2:21-38
- Read page 169 in the *Shine On* story Bible

Prime the pump:

- **Things to notice:**
 - Jesus gets circumcised! This was a fulfillment of the covenant God made with Abraham.
 - Jesus is presented at the temple in Jerusalem. Remember when this temple was built? It's not the one Solomon built; it's the second temple. Jesus will keep coming back to this temple in the story.
 - Notice how Simeon and Anna each come to be in the temple just when the infant Jesus is there.
- **Background information:**
 - We don't really know what is meant by "purification" in verse 22. There was not purification requirement for fathers or infants, and Mary's purification would have been 40 days after the birth.
 - In Simeon's speech in verses 29-32, he references familiar passages from Isaiah (Isaiah 52:10, Isaiah 49:6 and Isaiah 46:13). Then in verses 34-35, he foreshadows what will come. Read just the words spoken by Simeon and see what it tells you about Jesus.
- **Conversation starters:**
 - In verse 36, Anna off-handedly called a "prophet." How does this strike you?
 - Simeon had been promised he would see the Messiah, and after he did, he said he was ready to die. Imagine and talk about this.
 - Simeon and Anna are both described as old, wise and devout. They fill in a necessary piece of the story of Jesus' birth. Look back over the richness of the characters in this New Testament story so far.
 - Read verse 33. Imagine being Mary and Joseph in this situation, surrounded by wisdom and overwhelmed with this special child.



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Week 32

Matthew 2:1-12

Review the big story: God created the cosmos and humans and called it all good. We were created to live in harmony, but sometimes we miss the mark. All of humanity missed the mark, and they had to live with the consequences, but God stuck with them and continued to love them. Then God called a family to be a blessing to the whole earth. Like the humans before them, the generations of this family often missed the mark, but God was faithful.

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- **Key verses:** Matthew 2:10-11

Tell the story: The writer of Matthew tells us another part of the story. Magi from the East read Jesus' birth in the stars, and traveled a long way to worship him. When they found Jesus, they gave him gifts fit for a king. The lurking danger is also introduced in this story. The Magi unwittingly went to Herod to ask for directions, alerting him to the presence of the infant Messiah.

- Read Matthew 2:1-12
- Read page 170 in the *Shine On* story Bible

Prime the pump:

- **Things to notice:**
 - Mappers, here's another one for you! The Magi probably came from Persia. Find that on the map and trace the journey of the Magi to Bethlehem.
 - Notice the uses of the title "King" in the first couple verses. What do you think the writer of Matthew might be trying to point our attention to?
 - Like with the donkey on the journey to Bethlehem, we have added to this story over the years. What are some of the things you've assumed about this part of the story that aren't here? Look through the story for clues about the origins of some of those imaginings.
 - Notice how God speaks to the Magi in this story. Look back at Matthew 1:20 and forward to Matthew 2:13. What's going on here?
- **Background information:**
 - What in the world were these Magi/Wise Men/Kings? *Magi* were a class of Zoroastrian priests, known as great astrologers. Interestingly, early Jewish readers would have regarded Persian astrologers as foolish, not wise.
 - And what was this star? A supernova? A comet? An alignment of the planets? We haven't yet found reliable sources to cross-reference its appearance with, so we don't know. We can know that the star "stopping" over the house Jesus was in is probably symbolic. If a star literally stopped over a house, it would incinerate it!
 - What do these gifts mean? Gold has much the same meaning and value today, but frankincense and myrrh take a little more explanation. They were often used for religious rituals, including anointing of kings and burial. These gifts may have had different symbolic meanings at different points in Jesus' life. Wonder: Do you think Mary, Joseph and Jesus ever used these gifts?
- **Conversation starters:**
 - The Magi are Gentiles. Think back to Jesus' genealogy. Here we have one more foreshadowing of the mission to the Gentiles. The definition of the people of God was expanding. If you think of this expansion as a continuing pattern throughout history, what does that mean for us today?
 - What do you make of the lurking danger in this story? What is Herod up to, enlisting the explanations of the scribes and priests and asking to pay homage?