



“This is the Story...”

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## **Week 29: A Grueling Journey**

Luke 2:1-5

**Intro Video:** [https://youtu.be/C\\_FO\\_0ja7RI](https://youtu.be/C_FO_0ja7RI)

**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 responded with deep joy and courage to the angel’s request.

- **Key verse:** Luke 2:4

**Tell the story:** Mary is pregnant with God’s child, and Joseph has decided to stick by her (see Matthew 1:18-25 for his story). Now a census is being taken, and Mary and Joseph must travel to be registered. We often speed through this part of the story, but there are some intriguing things to unpack!

- Read Luke 2:1-5

## Prime the pump:

- **Things to notice:**
  - There's a lot of "fulfillment of the scriptures" going on in the story of Jesus' birth. Even this traveling story is a fulfillment - read Psalm 87:5-6.
  - Read verse 4 in light of what we learned last week through studying the genealogy. Why is this verse so specific?
  - Wait a minute. Where's the donkey??? Every tradition has inserted assumptions and additions to this beloved story. It's okay to do that! And it's good to recognize those additions as our own way of doing midrash, playing with and interpreting the story.
- **Background information:**
  - Emperor Augustus ruled from 27 BCE-14 CE. His time was one of peace, and he was called "god," "son of god," "savior" and "father" by the people. So right away here, we have a challenge. Which "son of god" are the readers of Luke going to follow? (*Levine, Amy-Jill and Marc Zvi Brettler, Eds, 2017. The Jewish Annotated New Testament, 2nd Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, pg 113.*)
  - There's no corresponding evidence of this particular census. This doesn't mean it didn't happen, but regardless, it serves an important purpose in the story. Registration wasn't viewed positively in Jewish thought, and Mary and Joseph's obedience to it is intriguing. And it's all about the money - a census was taken to determine taxes. So there's something political going on in this piece of the story.
  - If you're interested in the Roman politics, look up the figures in this story - Augustus, Quirinius, and Herod the Great (not mentioned here, but another figure in this time period).
- **Conversation starters:**
  - Get out your map! Trace this journey. How long is it? How long would it have taken to travel? This site (<http://www.photorientalist.org/exhibitions/palestines-nativity-trail-a-journey-through-history/>) is one place to explore the journey.
  - We don't know exactly what this journey looked like. It's likely that Mary and Joseph were part of a caravan of people. They probably walked most or all of the way. Mary was heavily pregnant. Do your own imagining and playing with this story.
  - Women were registered under men as property in Roman censuses. So why did heavily pregnant Mary even go along?
  - Journeys are a major biblical theme. Think about the journeys we already have talked about in the big story. This is already the second journey in the story of Jesus' birth, and there are more to come. If this intrigues you, talk about and explore this theme.

**Microsong:** "A Grueling Journey" (Listen: [https://youtu.be/g5DKSv\\_JJwU](https://youtu.be/g5DKSv_JJwU))

About that time, Caesar Augustus orders a census that somehow means that Joseph has to travel up to Bethlehem from Nazareth. Mary, now a pregnant fiancé, makes the grueling journey. Maybe she was glad to get away. . .

**Sing the big song:** (Listen: <https://youtu.be/LriwWgdQ1d8>)

This is the story of how it all began. God made matter, and chaos shattered.  
Eve and Adam, they tried to hide. The world got violent and God replied with a mark and flood  
and a rainbow sign, God's love written on skin and sky,  
*Then God called a family to be a blessing to the earth, ohh ohhh*  
A mother and her favorite son wrestle for the blessing, another son becomes a slave, the land is  
saved from famine.  
God's family grows. Egypt oppresses. They groan to God, God sends Moses.  
*Ten strange signs say "Please release them!" By the sea God saves them. Ohh ohhh.*  
The people complain. God rains bread. Daily food and ten new rules.  
Five sisters come and ask for land. God says "Yes, amend the law!"  
*Moses says, "In your new life across the Jordan, love God with your whole heart and with all your  
being, and your strength, now listen: God is One, only God! God is One, only God!"*  
Cross over Jordan, stories and stones. Circuits and shouts and the walls come down.  
God sends judges like Deborah and the land has rest.  
Ruth's worth more than seven sons; Redeem the lost with steadfast love.  
Corruption in the temple, and God sends Samuel.  
God gives them a prophet, they ask for a king. Does God need a temple? A wise king forgets.  
And when a bully rules the land, the nation tears apart and loses David's heart.....  
A widow's gift and a prophet's cry. God brings life in desperate times.  
Josiah reads this misplaced scroll. He turns to God wholeheartedly like David did. In his time.  
God gives Jeremiah a picture of God's ruined family...  
Is there any hope left, is there any hope left, is there any hope left for you, Jerusalem?  
Any hope? Any hope left? Is there any hope left for you?  
By the streams of Babylon, how can we sing when you are gone, Jerusalem...  
I'm in a valley of human bones. These bones are Israel, God's breath is hope.  
Haman plans death for Esther's exiles. She risks her life so they might survive.  
Finally God's family rebuilds the temple in Jerusalem. God plunges them into a sea of joy and  
celebration of Only God. God is One, Only God.  
Comfort to Jerusalem, your warfare finally ceases.  
Matthew lists these generations, Abraham to Jesus.  
The angel says "You'll have a son and God will give him David's throne." Mary says "God looked  
at me now I'm the luckiest person around."  
Mary, now a pregnant fiancé, makes a grueling journey.  
*God loves every one of us, it's true, and God loves the universe.*

**Go do your household project!**