For the Teacher/Discussion Facilitator:

Context:

Luke is the third and longest book in the New Testament. Luke is the first of a two-part work. The Book of Acts forms the sequel to Luke.

Date and Place of Writing: Most scholars date the writing of Luke somewhere between A.D. 61,63.

Purpose and Readership Luke himself identified the purpose of his writing the Gospel ([Luke 1:1-4](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+1:1-4&t1=eng_nas&sr=1) ). He wanted to confirm for Theophilus the certainty of the things Theophilus had been taught. Luke also wanted this information available for a wider readership. Most scholars conclude that Luke's target audience were Gentile inquirers and Christians who needed strengthening in the faith.

Most of Luke’s stories fall in chronological sequence. Beyond the immediate purposes of the author, the Holy Spirit has chosen Luke's Gospel to reach all nations with the beautiful story of God's love in Christ. Many claim that Luke’s birth narrative ([Luke 2:1-20](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+2:1-20&t1=eng_nas&sr=1) ) is their favorite.

In Luke 2:8-22 The King of glory is coming as a man among men, and that was how He was to be seen. Luke does not mention the visit of the Magi ([Matthew 2:1-11](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=mt+2:1-11&t1=eng_nas&sr=1)). This is quite understandable, for it would not have fitted into the theme of this chapter, which is based around humility and humble beginnings. Rather, Luke does stress the visit of the shepherds to the child lying in a manger, placing it in direct contrast with the rulers in their palaces.

But this description of His lowly birth is then followed by a series of testimonies, first by angels, and then by the Holy Spirit, to His status and future. These may be seen as paralleling the inspiration that has gone before in chapter 1. Jesus is to be seen as celebrated by God both before and after His birth. Heaven bears witness while the earth is silent. And the chapter then ends with Him briefly in His Father’s house, an indication of what is to come.

How quietly the event itself takes place, for the birth is all over in two verses. Nevertheless, in this passage Luke brings out all that needs to be brought out, and among these things he deliberately and emphatically draws attention to the fact that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, as a scion of the house of David. This is emphasized by the background history so that it cannot be missed. It is stressing that He was of the house and family of David.

Chapter [Luke 2:8](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+2:8&t1=eng_nas&sr=1) looks back on the great event. But the great event itself passes in a way that is so ordinary that we can hardly credit it (in total contrast to His death). The King is being born in order to commence His Kingly Rule, and yet all we see, and are told of, in Luke is a baby lying in a manger arrayed in a swaddling cloth. It reminds us that He came into the world as true man.

So the opening draws attention to the fact that Jesus came as a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, into a world ruled by Rome, and in a land governed by Rome, even though in the case of Palestine indirectly, and that His own life will be very much affected by Rome’s decisions. Even Herod is very much a vassal king under Roman control, and has to submit to Caesar’s decrees, as is made clear here. Rome controls all. This emphasis on Roman authority at the beginning of Luke’s writings ties in with Luke’s later emphasis at the end of his two books on the fact that the Kingly Rule of God must be established and proclaimed by an Apostle in Rome ([Acts 23:11](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=ac+23:11&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Acts 28:0](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=ac+28:0&t1=eng_nas&sr=1)), by which time the accomplishment of this baby will be resounding throughout the Roman Empire as the word mightily prevails. stressed the universal redemption available to all through Christ.

Exegesis (careful analytical study of the Bible to produce accurate interpretation of the passage):

We should note that in the two Gospels that speak of Jesus’ birth those who acknowledge Him are the unexpected. Matthew has foreigners coming to acknowledge Jesus and Luke has shepherds. That Luke stresses the shepherds ties in with his continual emphasis on the poor. Shepherds were typically seen (sometimes quite justly) as dishonest and irreligious. Indeed, their testimony was unacceptable in law courts. However, the fact that God selected these men out suggests that they at least were devout men. Indeed, others see these shepherds as those employed by the priests and the Temple in order to look after sheep which had been brought for offerings, which would tie in with this. Even so they would still be poor and have difficulty in maintaining the proper observance of ceremonial law.

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Luke 2:8-9

*‘And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.’*

As they sat around talking and peering every now and again into the darkness for any sign of predators, they must have been greatly astonished when suddenly an angel of the Lord stood by them, especially as, with his presence, the glory of the Lord shone around them.

Had God wanted us to know who this angel was He would have told us. Speculation is useless. But all knew what ‘the glory of the Lord’ represented. This was God revealing His glory long awaited by Israel, as a preview of what was to come. It was in direct contrast with the darkness which accompanied the cross when the light appeared to be going out. Such a revelation from God must have been terrifying to those poor men. It would be the last thing that they were expecting. So ‘they were terrified.’

Question:

Have you ever experienced the “Glory of God?” Can you briefly share that experience? How did it change you?

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Luke 2:10-11

*‘And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’*

The angel assured them that they need not be afraid. Rather they should rejoice. For he had brought them good news indeed, ‘good news of great joy’ (for ‘joy’ compare [Luke 1:14](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+1:14&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Luke 1:47](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+1:47&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Luke 1:58](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+1:58&t1=eng_nas&sr=1)). It was good news which would be for ‘all people’ (compare [Isaiah 61:1](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=isa+61:1&t1=eng_nas&sr=1)). The shepherds would see this as meaning all classes of people in Israel, including themselves.

The words are expressed in the same kind of language that was used by kings and emperors when a new heir was born. It was the Birth Announcement of a King. The birth of Augustus was also said to have been heralded as ‘good tidings’. They were tidings of joy for all. In this case the words happened to be true. His birth really was good tidings.

In [Luke 2:1](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+2:1&t1=eng_nas&sr=1) Caesar Augustus had announced his decree. Now it was God’s turn to issue a decree as He called these shepherds to pay allegiance to the Savior. Caesar had called the mightiest in the Empire to submit to him. Here, symbolically, God also called the mightiest in His empire, those who were meek and lowly. Two empires were progressing side by side. But the empire of the meek and lowly would eventually come out on top.

* ‘*In the city of David*.’ A clear indication that here was the promised coming ‘David’, the everlasting King promised by the prophets.
* *‘a Savior.*’ This idea of Jesus as the Savior is prominent in Luke (see [Luke 2:30](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+2:30&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Luke 1:69](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+1:69&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Luke 1:71](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+1:71&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Luke 1:77](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+1:77&t1=eng_nas&sr=1)). He has come to seek and to save that which was lost ([Luke 19:9-10](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+19:9-10&t1=eng_nas&sr=1)), as is evidenced by the parables (see especially chapter 15). And His work is regularly spoke of in terms of ‘saving’ or ‘making whole’.
* *‘Christ the Lord*.’ He is also both Messiah and Lord. Compare [Acts 2:36](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=ac+2:36&t1=eng_nas&sr=1) whereas the crucified and risen One He is made ‘both Lord and Messiah’. As Messiah He fulfills all the promises in the Old Testament of a great Deliverer from the house of David. As Lord He is superior to David as his Lord ([Luke 20:41-44](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+20:41-44&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Psalms 110:1](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=ps+110:1&t1=eng_nas&sr=1)), and Paul takes it further by seeing in the title the Name above every Name, the Name of YHWH ([Philippians 2:9-11](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=php+2:9-11&t1=eng_nas&sr=1)). The three titles reveal His saving power, His fulfillment of prophecy, and His position as supreme Lord. The chapter began with Caesar Augustus, who was regularly called Savior and Lord. Now we are introduced to the greater and more effective Savior and Lord as pronounced from heaven.

Question:

(Verse 10) Has fear ever caused you to miss experiencing God’s glory?

(Verse 10) Why does this “good news” cause such “great joy?”

(Verse 10) For whom is this “good news” intended? Who is this reflected in our church’s mission and vision statement?

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Luke 2:12

*‘And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.’*

And how would this babe be known? By the sign that God had given. That is, by the fact that he was wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. This was no accident. It was prearranged. Strange identification for the arrival of the Lord Messiah, and even more so for the Son of the Most High. But it was so. The One Who holds all things together ([Colossians 1:17](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=col+1:17&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Hebrews 1:3](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=heb+1:3&t1=eng_nas&sr=1)), was Himself held together in swaddling clothes. And it was very apt for shepherds as His lying in a manger revealed the baby as associated with their kind of work. He lay in a manger where animals would feed and was thus revealed as One who had come to the meek and lowly. They would have felt very much at home.

Question:

(Verse 12) Why does the Son of the Most High, Christ, the King of Kings, now lay in a cattle trough wrapped in rags?

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Luke 2:13-14

*‘And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,'“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”*

And then all Heaven broke loose, for as the shepherds watched in amazement they saw with the angel a whole mass of the heavenly host, praising God for what He was doing. Great legions would be called on to welcome the Emperor’s son when he was born, and to hail his birth. But even greater legions welcomed into the world the Son of God. The legions of angels, which would not be called on to prevent His death ([Matthew 26:53](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=mt+26:53&t1=eng_nas&sr=1)), came to celebrate His birth. What was happening was strange to these shepherds, but it must have seemed even stranger to those angels. No one knew better than they that this baby deserved the highest place that Heaven affords. And yet all He had here was a manger. How they must have cringed to see Him lying there. But it was not for them to criticize their Lord and God. They could only wonder and sing His praise for what He was willing to do in order to save men and women.

* *‘Glory to God in the Highest*.’ That is ever what they cry whether they are on earth or in heaven (compare [Revelation 4:11](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=re+4:11&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Revelation 5:13](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=re+5:13&t1=eng_nas&sr=1)). For they, and they alone, really appreciate His true glory. To those who know Him as He is, He is the glorious One. And behind it lay the idea that this glory was now visiting the earth. As John could say, ‘we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth’ ([John 1:14](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=joh+1:14&t1=eng_nas&sr=1))
* *‘and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased*.’ God reveals His glory in Heaven and His peace on earth. It is through peace in their hearts that men experience His glory.

The coming of this baby into the world would offer to men peace with God ([Romans 5:1](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=ro+5:1&t1=eng_nas&sr=1)), peace from God ([Romans 1:7](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=ro+1:7&t1=eng_nas&sr=1) and often), and the peace of God which passes all understanding ([Philippians 4:7](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=php+4:7&t1=eng_nas&sr=1)). And this would be for all who responded fully to Him and thereby in their lives were pleasing to Him. This was indeed what Jesus had come to do as the prince of Peace, to save men and women and enable them to be reconciled to God through His gracious provision for their need so that He might reveal His kindness towards them continually for evermore ([Ephesians 2:6-7](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=eph+2:6-7&t1=eng_nas&sr=1)). This was why the angel had called Him, ‘the Savior’.

Question:

(Verses 13-14) How does God revealing His glory result in peace on earth?

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Luke 2:15

*When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”*

Once the angels had departed section by section like a marching regiment (the word suggests going away following one after another), and the glorious light of God no longer shone, the shepherds were quick in coming to their decision. “*Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us*.” This was the language of men who had experienced the glory of God.

Question:

(Verse 15) Why do you think these disengaged and socially awkward shepherds immediately wanted to return to the town and tell their story?

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Luke 2:16-18

*‘And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.’ 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.*

So as rapidly as they could they hurried to Bethlehem, and there they searched for and found Mary and Joseph with the baby lying in the manger. And once they had seen what they saw they went away and continually told everywhere what the angels had told them about this child, and there was great wonder everywhere as people considered what the shepherds said. They would make it known for years. It was a never to be forgotten event. Such amazement is another theme of Luke’s writings ([Luke 2:33](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+2:33&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Luke 2:47](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+2:47&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Luke 4:22](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+4:22&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Luke 8:25](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+8:25&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Luke 9:43](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+9:43&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Luke 11:14](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+11:14&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Luke 11:38](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+11:38&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Luke 20:26](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+20:26&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Luke 24:12](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+24:12&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Luke 24:41](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+24:41&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Acts 2:7](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=ac+2:7&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Acts 2:12](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=ac+2:12&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Acts 3:10](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=ac+3:10&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Acts 9:21](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=ac+9:21&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Acts 13:12](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=ac+13:12&t1=eng_nas&sr=1)). For the Good News is truly amazing.

Question:

(Verses 16-18) Do you think we ever lose our awestruck wonder and motivation to share the good news? Why?

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Luke 2:19

*‘But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them’*

‘*But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart*.’ Mary, to whom the shepherds would have explained everything, kept what they had said, along with what the angel had said to her earlier, and everything else that she heard about those days, and pondered on them regularly in her heart. She no doubt explained this to Luke when she was telling him about these wonderful events. It was inevitable that it would be so. They were not things easily forgotten. It was not until she got older and ‘more sensible’ that she tried to but a brake on Jesus’ ministry ([Mark 3:21](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=mr+3:21&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Mark 3:31-35](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=mr+3:31-35&t1=eng_nas&sr=1)). For, godly woman though she was, like us she was only human.

“*And the shepherds*.’ They returned to the countryside, and to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen. Such behavior inevitably follows hearing the Good News. Compare [Luke 5:26](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+5:26&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Luke 7:16](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+7:16&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Luke 13:13](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+13:13&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Luke 17:15](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+17:15&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Luke 18:43](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+18:43&t1=eng_nas&sr=1), [Luke 23:47](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=lu+23:47&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Acts 2:47](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=ac+2:47&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Acts 4:21](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=ac+4:21&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Acts 10:46](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=ac+10:46&t1=eng_nas&sr=1); [Acts 13:48](https://www.studylight.org/study-desk.html?q1=ac+13:48&t1=eng_nas&sr=1). The glad tidings were for all mankind.

Note the interesting contrasts. The hearers were filled with wonder, Mary kept it all in her heart and meditated on it, the shepherds glorified and praised God. They had no doubt about what had happened.

Question:

**(Verses 19-20) Mary treasured up these things and pondered them in her heart. The Shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. What does the good news of Jesus Birth do inside of you?**

Prayer:

* Thank God for sending His Son to all types of people, like us.
* Thank God for revealing His glory to you.
* Ask God to help you experience His joy this Christmas season.
* Ask God for the gift of awestruck wonder and motivation to share the Good News.

Resources:

Holman Bible Dictionary

[bible.org](http://bible.org)

[logos.com](http://logos.com)