



# STORIES AND RITUALS

## LESSON 16

### Stories & Rituals: The Bible in Broad Strokes

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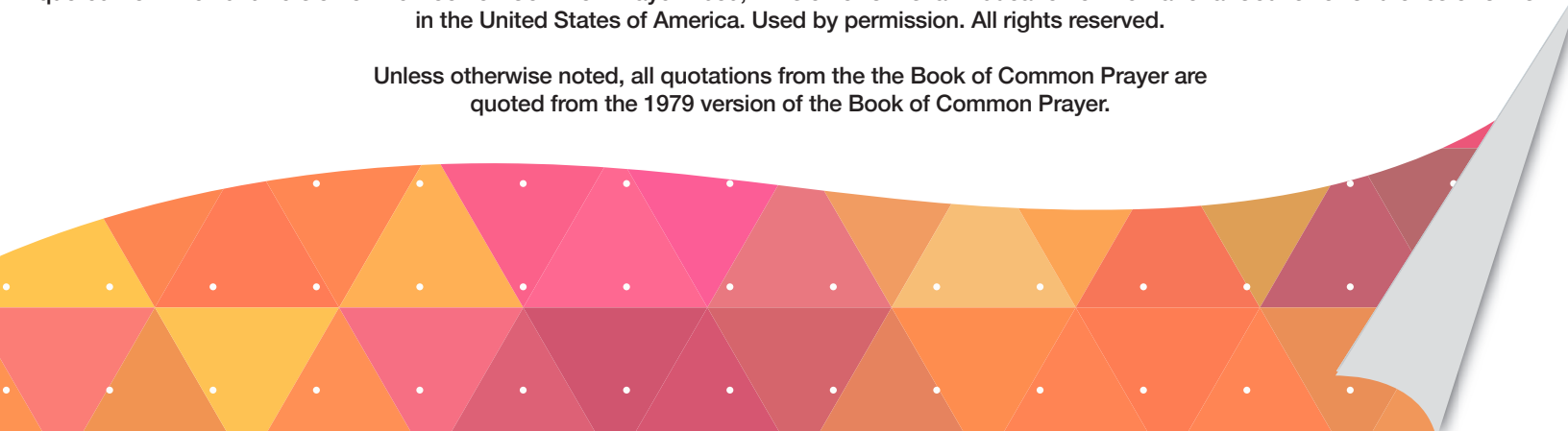
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# Jesus is Born & Shepherds Visit

**Texts:** Luke 2:1-20

**Big Idea:** The Word was made flesh and dwelled among us.

## Lesson Objectives

### Participants will:

1. Demonstrate teamwork by re-creating a famous structure with a group.
2. Understand the incarnation by engaging in a re-telling of the Christmas story.
3. Use personal reflections and actions to perform an act of worship.

### ACTIVITY (TIME)

Dive In (10 minutes)  
**Group Check-In**

Community Builder (15 minutes)  
**Flashing Lights**

The Story (15 minutes)  
**Jesus Is Born & Shepherds Visit**

The Ritual (15 minutes)  
**Welcoming the Light**

Dig Deeper (10 minutes)  
**Incarnations**

Wrap it Up (5 minutes)  
**Closing Prayer**

### MATERIALS NEEDED

• Nothing

• Flashlights

• Copy of Lesson Sheet 16.1

• Soft, instrumental music (optional)  
• Method for playing music (optional)  
• Bible • Nativity Set  
• Large Banner or paper  
• Candles, Lighters  
• Markers

• Large mixing bowls & spoons  
• Water • Salt • Food coloring  
• Flour • Canola oil  
• Measuring cups & tablespoons  
• Plastic Ziploc bags

• Nothing

# LESSON OVERVIEW



## What's the Story?

Today's story is found in Luke 2:1-20. This story continues the narrative of Jesus' coming by telling the story of Jesus' birth. This story is heard during Christmas celebrations, but it is a story that we can also hear and reflect on year round.

At the start of the story, a very pregnant Mary and Joseph journey together to Bethlehem. While they are in Bethlehem, Mary gives birth to her firstborn, a son. It is in the manger that we encounter the light of the world. It is in the manger that we see how "the Word was made flesh and dwelled among us." (John 1:14) The shepherds hear of this great event through the angels, and seeing the Christ child causes them to worship God and tell others of the good news.

What we know as the Christmas story is also a story of God being made present to the world through the person of Christ. This story is the story of the incarnation. Jesus is God on earth—he came to bring God's kingdom to earth and be an example to us of how to live.



## What's the "Big Idea?"

Today's lesson focuses on the idea that *the Word was made flesh and dwelled among us*. Our Christian tradition teaches us that God was made flesh through the person of Jesus Christ. God is revealed to us through the incarnation. Even today, God is present and dwells among us. We witness the incarnation in different, personal ways.



## What's the Symbol?

When decorating for Christmas, many people remember the birth of Christ by setting out nativity scenes. Find a nativity scene to display and use for the ritual. It doesn't have to be elaborate or large. Although you can use as many pieces of the nativity as you wish, be sure to include Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus.



## What's the Ritual?

Today's ritual will invite participants to think about how they thank and praise God for the coming of Jesus, the light of the world. They will do this by writing or drawing their praises near the nativity scene. Then, each participant will light a candle in thanksgiving for Jesus, God made flesh on earth.



## Setting Up Your Space

Set up your "altar" area. Set up a table and cover it with fabric or linen. On the table, place a few candles, a large cross, and your nativity scene. Place a large banner of paper on the floor in front of the altar. Have supplies for the ritual and the Dig Deeper activity (if you will be completing it) nearby. If you are doing the Community Builder activity, gather the supplies you need.

## DIVE IN (10 MINUTES)

### Group Check-In

#### *Materials:*

- Nothing

#### During the session:

- Open your session with a quick prayer. Use this one or a prayer of your own:  
**Holy Lord, open our eyes, ears, and hearts to see your love and faithfulness in the world around us. Help us see your love for us in your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**
- **Let's start our time together by sharing some of the great and not-so-great things that have happened to us this week. What were the high points and low points of your week?**  
Go around the group and invite everyone to share.

## COMMUNITY BUILDER (15 MINUTES)

### Flashing Lights

#### *Materials:*

- Flashlights

#### During the session:

- **Today I'm going to give you the challenge of being an "architect." One of the cool things about architects is that they take ideas and make them into buildings or spaces. What starts as an abstract idea becomes something concrete.**
- **Ask for one volunteer to hold the flashlight. In a moment I am going to assign you a famous building. Your job is to try "drawing" the building on the wall using the flashlight. The rest of the group has to figure out what building you are drawing!**
- **Assign the volunteer a building. Some ideas include: the Eiffel Tower, the Empire State Building, the Coliseum, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the Great Wall of China, etc.**
- **At your signal, the volunteer begins drawing the building on the wall. The rest of the group must try to guess what building is being drawn.**
- **Once the group correctly guesses the building (or after five guesses, whichever comes first), the flashlight is passed to a different person. The next person receives a different building they must draw.**
- **Participants take turns drawing buildings, and the group continues guessing. Continue playing the game until either everyone has a turn to draw, or until you run out of time.**



# THE STORY

## (15 MINUTES)

### Jesus is Born & Shepherds Visit

#### Materials:

- Copy of Lesson Sheet 16.1

#### Before the session:

- Make a copy of Lesson Sheet 16.1
- Practice reading through the story several times so you are familiar with it.

#### During the session:

- Tell the story on Lesson Sheet 16.1.
- **After the story, ask: What is this story telling us about God?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: God comes to dwell with us in the form of Jesus Christ; God keeps God's promises of liberty and justice through the birth of Jesus.]*
- **What is this story telling us about humanity?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: When we see the incarnation of God on earth, we are filled with awe, wonder, and joy; we respond to God's love through worship and praise.]*
- **What is this story telling us about the world?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: The world is filled with signs of God's faithfulness; the world is full of God's presence through Christ.]*
- **In John's Gospel, we are told that "the Word was made flesh and dwelled among us." The story of Christ's birth tells the story of God coming to dwell with us. When the shepherds saw the incarnation of the Word through Christ, they were filled with awe, wonder, and joy. We see the Word made flesh in the world, too, and when we do, we respond with wonder and praise to God.**



# THE RITUAL

## (15 MINUTES)

## Welcoming the Light

### Materials:

- Soft, instrumental music (optional)
- Method for playing music (optional)
- Bible
- Markers
- Nativity Set
- Large banner of paper
- Tea Light candles
- Lighter

### Before the session:

- Set up the ritual. Place your nativity set on the altar area. Set your large banner of paper on the floor in front of the altar.

### During the session:

- If you are playing music, begin playing it softly.
- Read John 8:12 to the group.
- **As Christians, we hear this verse a lot. When we talk about the coming of Christ, we talk about the coming of the light of the world. The coming of this light brings us joy, and we respond to the coming of Jesus with worship and praise.**
- Invite participants to take a marker.
- **In a moment, I am going to invite you to come forward and share your worship and praise. We will do this by expressing our thoughts through writing—you can write, draw, or do anything else you are comfortable with. If you'd rather spend time in quiet reflection, that's okay, too. Just take a moment to praise God for the coming of Christ.**
- Invite everyone forward to create their worship. Once everyone is finished, hand one tea light candle to each person.
- **Now that we have spent some time in prayer and worship, let's give one more thanksgiving to God for the light of the world coming to dwell with us. When you feel called to, I invite you to come forward with your candle. Place it near our nativity scene and light it. As you light your candle, thank God for the light that comes with Jesus.**
- Begin by lighting your candle. Then, invite each person in the group to bring forward their candles, too.
- End the ritual by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

# DIG DEEPER

## (10 MINUTES)

### Incarnations

#### Materials:

- Large mixing bowls (one for every 2-3 participants)
- Plastic Ziploc bags
- Large spoons (one for every 2-3 participants)
- Plastic Ziploc bags
- Water
- Flour
- Canola oil
- Salt
- Food coloring
- Measuring cups and tablespoons

*Note: This activity can get messy! Protect the surfaces on which you will be doing this activity. Newspapers and plastic tablecloths work well.*

#### Before the session:

- Make your own set of play dough.

#### During the session:

- Split participants into groups of two or three. Invite groups to follow the recipe instructions and mix everything in their mixing bowl.
- Have groups begin making the dough. Begin by having them measure one cup of water and pour it into their bowl.
- Add food coloring to the water.
- Invite groups to add 4 cups of flour and 1 ½ cups of salt to the bowl and blend the ingredients together.
- Then, add two to four tablespoons of oil to the bowl. The oil is what makes this dough soft. Adding too little oil will make the dough crumbly. Mix everything together.
- Knead the dough together until a soft dough forms. This recipe should make enough for each person in the group to have a generous amount. Invite groups to split the dough so that everyone has some.
- **Jesus is the Word made flesh—that means that Christ is present in the world around us. Where is Christ present in your life? Use your dough to make a sculpture that illustrates your interpretation of how the Word is made flesh in the world.**
- Give participants time to create. If the group is comfortable doing so, share creations with each other.
- Give each person a plastic bag to carry home their dough.

# WRAP IT UP

## (5 MINUTES)

### Closing Prayer

Invite the group to share any prayer concerns or requests they may have for the week.

Close your time together in prayer. Use the following or pray your own prayer:

**Holy God, you are made present to us through the person of Jesus Christ. Open our hearts to receive the Word in our midst with joy and love. Grant us the awe, wonder, and joy from Christ's coming that brings you honor, glory, and worship. We ask this through Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**



# Lesson Sheet 16.1

## Jesus Is Born & Shepherds Visit

### **A story from the Gospel according to Luke:**

In those days, the emperor Augustus ordered that every person in the world should be registered and counted. Everyone went to their own towns to be counted. Joseph also left his home in Nazareth (in Galilee) and travelled to Bethlehem because he was a descendant of the family of David.

He went to be counted with his fiancée Mary, who was pregnant. While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to have her baby boy. She wrapped him in cloth and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

There was a group of shepherds nearby, watching their flocks of sheep in their fields. That night, an angel was sent from God and appeared to them, and they saw God's glory shine around them. They were terrified. The angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for I bring you good news that will bring hope, peace, and joy to everyone. This day your Savior is born in Bethlehem, the city of David. He is Christ, the Messiah, God on earth. You will find him this way: he will be wrapped in cloth and lying in a manger."

Suddenly, a large multitude of angels appeared. They began praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth!"

Then, the angels left the shepherds and went back into heaven. The shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see what has happened." So they went to Bethlehem and they found Mary, Joseph, and the baby, lying in the manger just as the angel had told them.

When the shepherds saw this, they left and told everyone what was said to them about the child. They told everyone what they had seen and heard, and each person was filled with wonder and amazement at what the shepherds said. But Mary, reflecting on all that happened, took these memories and stored them in her heart.

The shepherds left Bethlehem and returned to their flocks, praising God for everything they had seen and heard, and for the way that God had been made known to them through the angels and the manger.