



# Good News, Great Joy

## STUDY GUIDE

**TRUTH**  
FORLIFE

# THIS STUDY GUIDE

contains six sessions that consider the incredible—and, in some ways, incredibly ordinary—events of Jesus' birth. Luke's account reveals the glory of the Gospel amid the miraculous and the mundane. You will get the most out of this study by intently watching, reading, or listening to the sermons from Alistair Begg's series *Good News, Great Joy* as you progress. The content for each session accompanies a particular sermon Alistair preached on the nativity story and its aftermath in Luke 2.



FIND ALL 6 MESSAGES AT  
[TFL.ORG/GOOD-NEWS.](https://www.tfl.org/good-news)

*Good News, Great Joy: Study Guide*  
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The following description of the *Good News, Great Joy* sermon series provides a good summary of this study's aim:

*What is the purpose behind the celebration of Christmas? For those who are in Christ, the holiday's meaning lies solely in the birth of Jesus. Based on his own careful investigation, Luke's account of Christ's birth is more than a heartwarming story or a call to blind faith—it is true, historical, and life-changing. It is good news, and it brings great joy to a world darkened by sin.*

*In these sermons, Alistair Begg draws our attention to the truth of the nativity story. This story, in some ways simple and in others so profound, is at the heart of understanding who God is and what He has done. In it, we discover a stirring picture of God's willingness to come and meet us where we are, to use unlikely people for His glory, and to supernaturally intervene on our behalf. A child is born! Christmas is cause for celebration because God Himself has come.*

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## Each session includes four parts:

- 1) Getting Started:** a brief summary statement or commentary on the sermon, followed by an introductory question
- 2) Key Scriptures:** important Bible verses that were referenced in the sermon and are flagged for further meditation and memorization
- 3) Going Deeper:** questions to help you process the main ideas of the sermon
- 4) Giving Praise:** a hymn that can be committed to memory, incorporated in worship, and used as the basis for prayer about what you have learned and considered



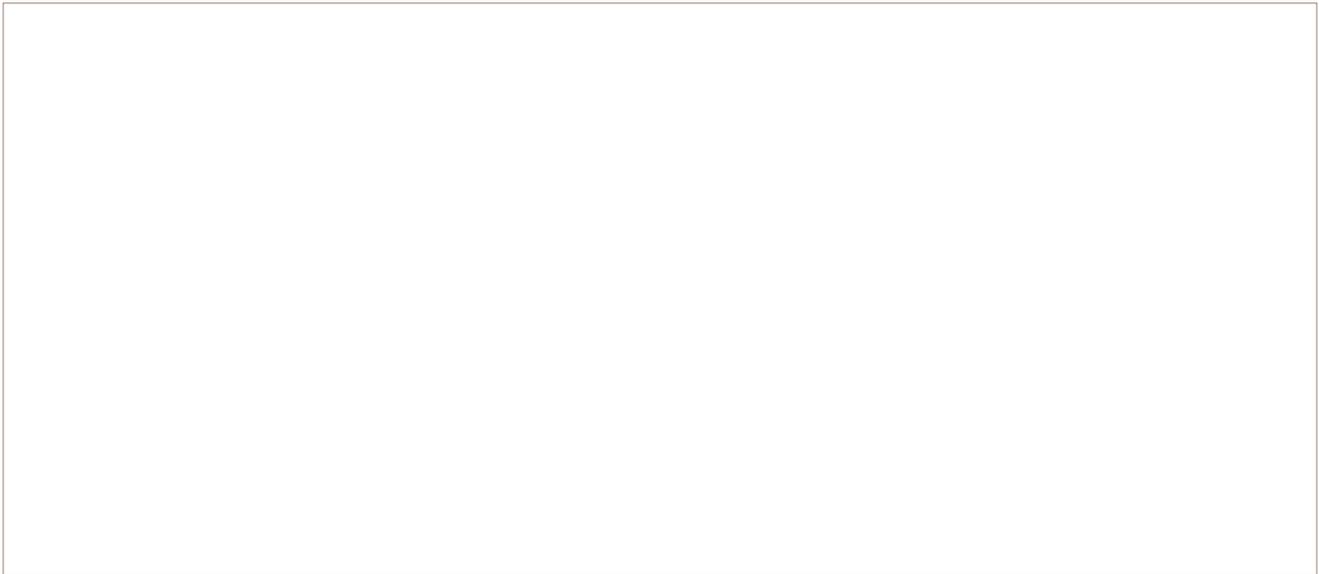
# SESSION ONE

“The Birth of Jesus Christ – Part One” | Luke 2:1-5

## Getting Started

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus’ birth is presented in just seven verses and without the sentimentality that’s often associated with the nativity.

What does the presentation of these verses tell us about Luke as a reporter and storyteller? How does this align with his stated purpose in 1:1-4?



### KEY SCRIPTURES

“It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”

LUKE 1:3-4

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria.”

LUKE 2:1-2

## Going Deeper

1. What does Luke 2:1-2 tell us about the political context of Judea and Galilee at the time of Jesus' birth?

2. Read verses 1-7 again, paying attention to the individuals and their actions. What actions is *God* taking in this story?

3. Define the word *providence*. Outside the Gospel of Luke, what are some examples in the Bible of God's providential work? (Consider, for example, Ruth or Esther.)

4. Alistair says, "A Christian believer is certain about certain things." What are some things regarding the nativity and the wider Gospel story we can be certain about, given the Bible's witness to us?

5. If we take for granted that the nativity story is real and historical, how might that influence our beliefs and behavior—perhaps especially during Christmastime?

6. Briefly, what is the difference between *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*? Does the nativity story appeal to you on any of these three levels? To which of the three do you find yourself most resistant?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Once in royal David's city  
Stood a lowly cattle shed,  
Where a mother laid her baby  
In a manger for His bed:  
Mary was that mother mild,  
Jesus Christ her little child.

“ONCE IN ROYAL DAVID'S CITY”

BY CECIL FRANCES ALEXANDER

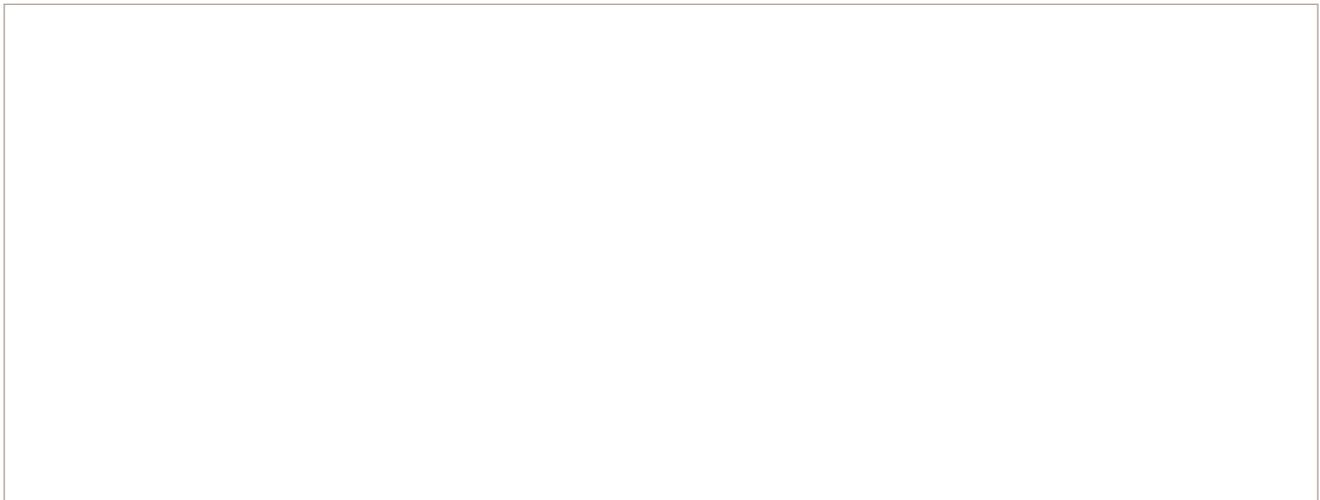
# SESSION TWO

“The Birth of Jesus Christ – Part Two” | Luke 2:1–5

## Getting Started

The Gospel of Luke is full of characters, like Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5–6) and Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25, 36–38), who live in the midst of history, expecting God to do great and wonderful things. They see these miracles come to pass in their generation.

As you read Scripture, do you tend to come with a sense of expectation about what God can do or a sense of doubt about whether spectacular things can really happen? How might your beliefs about miracles affect how you read the nativity story?



### KEY SCRIPTURES

“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

LUKE 1:31–33

“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

GALATIANS 4:4–5

## Going Deeper

1. Luke shows absolutely no embarrassment about including stories about angels and a virgin birth in his researched record. Why can he bring these elements together so easily?

2. Alistair says, “All this angelic stuff and all this supernatural stuff is an intrinsic part of the Gospel. It’s not superfluous. It’s not supplemental. It is foundational.” What happens when we try to strip the miracles away from our teaching or understanding of Scripture?

3. Jesus’ straightforward arrival seems to be in stark contrast to His identity as the incarnate God. What does the plainness of the birth narrative tell us about the nature of the incarnation?

4. Read Luke 1:26-38. What does the angel’s message tell us about the nativity that the plain event of a baby born in Bethlehem does *not* tell us?

5. What role does the Holy Spirit play in helping us to understand and believe what the Bible says? Do you see signs that the Spirit has worked or is working in your heart in relationship to the nativity story?

6. Is there any part of the nativity story you find especially difficult to believe? What credence does Luke's testimony and the consideration of God's power lend to it?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Christ, by highest heav'n adored,  
Christ the everlasting Lord!  
Late in time, behold Him come,  
Offspring of the virgin's womb.  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;  
Hail th'incarnate Deity,  
Pleased as man with men to dwell,  
Jesus, our Immanuel.

**"HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING"**

**BY CHARLES WESLEY**

# SESSION THREE

“A Savior, Christ the Lord” | Luke 2:8-12

## Getting Started

The apostles Peter (2 Peter 1:16), John (1 John 1:1-3), and Paul (1 Cor. 15:8) each wrote about the amazing things they witnessed with their own eyes—things that would otherwise be hard to believe. And the apostle Thomas even refused to believe that Jesus was risen until he saw it himself (John 20:25).

Think about an experience you've had that you would not have believed if you had not seen it yourself. What made it so incredible or challenging to explain to others?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.”

LUKE 1:51-53

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

LUKE 2:10-11

## Going Deeper

1. What is an angel? Why are angels involved in the announcement of the Messiah's birth?

2. What is surprising about the angels appearing to shepherds? What does this reveal about the heart of God?

3. Paul wrote, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise" (1 Cor. 1:27). Do you ever find yourself ashamed by the seeming foolishness of the Gospel? By the low reputation of fellow believers? How does God want you to feel about these things? (See 1 Cor. 1:28-31.)

4. Luke's account of Christ's birth (2:1-7) was a plain presentation of the facts. What does the angel's message add to that account?

5. Alistair says that the angel announces (1) salvation (2) through Christ alone (3) for everyone. What words or phrases in Luke 2:10-11 give us each of these three elements?

6. What evidence do you see in your own life of a need for a Savior?

7. Since it's God in Christ who saves us from our sin, what should our attitude be about ourselves and toward others?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

It is a thing most wonderful,  
Almost too wonderful to be,  
That God's own Son should come from heav'n  
And die to save a child like me.

And yet I know that it is true;  
He chose a poor and humble lot  
And wept and toiled and mourned and died  
For love of those who loved Him not.

**"IT IS A THING MOST WONDERFUL"**

**BY WILLIAM WALSHAM HOW**

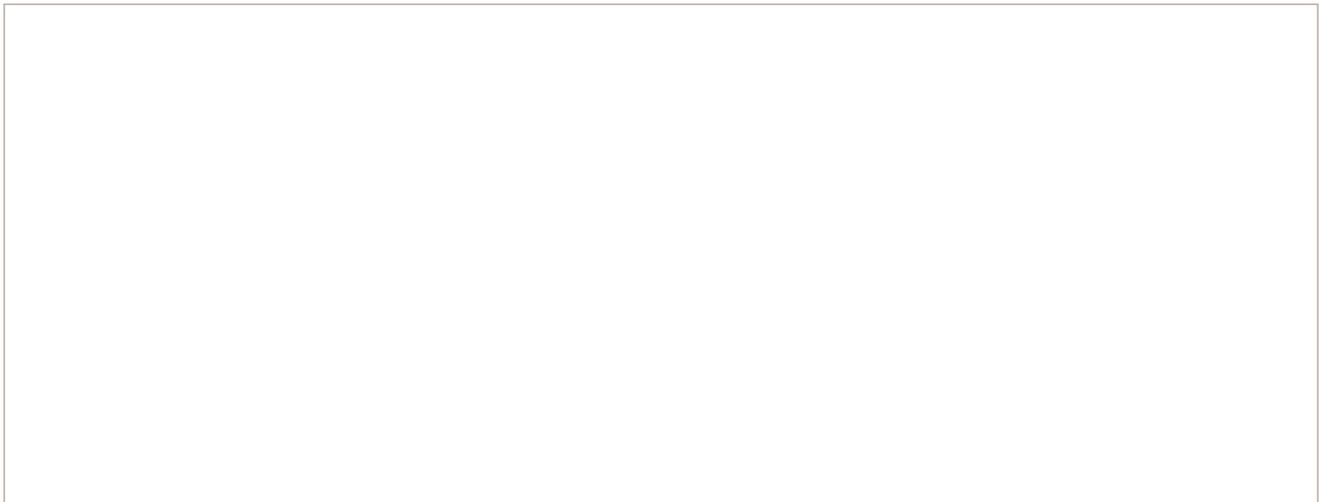
# SESSION FOUR

“The Sign and the Song” | Luke 2:12-17

## Getting Started

As we have seen, the nativity story happens against the backdrop of the Roman Empire and its great men—particularly Octavian (“Caesar Augustus” in Luke 2:1), the adopted heir of Julius Caesar. Yet the announcement of Jesus’ birth comes “to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay.”

In our day, who are the “great” men and women of the world? How do you find yourself tempted to put hope in such men and women?



### KEY SCRIPTURES

“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!’”

LUKE 2:13-14

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

2 CORINTHIANS 8:9

## Going Deeper

1. The angel tells the shepherds to look for a sign (v. 12). How was this sign meant to help the shepherds? What does it tell them about the kind of Savior that has come?

2. In what respects is the picture of Christ in the manger a foreshadowing of Christ in the tomb? What is the relationship between Christ's birth and his death and burial?

3. As we consider the contrast between the emperor enthroned in Rome and the Infant King laid in a feeding trough, what role does faith play? Why is faith necessary to regard Christ as God's Savior?

4. Augustus brought the "Pax Romana" to the world, ending the wars within the bounds of his empire. What is the difference between the peace that the emperor brought and the peace that the angels proclaimed?

5. What is the means by which Christ brings us peace with God?

6. What does the haste of the shepherds tell us about the news they received?

7. Alistair says, "Our society ... is sagging beneath the burden of emptiness." Where do you see the evidence of this statement around you?

8. Has Christ lifted the burden of emptiness from your shoulders? What change has He brought about in your heart?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Thou didst leave Thy throne  
And Thy kingly crown  
When Thou camest to earth for me;  
But in Bethlehem's home  
Was there found no room  
For Thy holy nativity.

O come to my heart, Lord Jesus;  
There is room in my heart for Thee.

**"THOU DIDST LEAVE THY THRONE"**  
**BY EMILY ELIZABETH STEELE ELLIOT**

# SESSION FIVE

“Just the Facts” | Luke 2:17–20

## Getting Started

H. L. Mencken once wrote, “Faith may be defined briefly as an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable.”<sup>1</sup>

Bertrand Russell similarly wrote, “We may define ‘faith’ as a firm belief in something for which there is no evidence.”<sup>2</sup>

How should a Christian define *faith*? In what respect do the definitions offered by these famous atheists go awry?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“They went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.”

LUKE 2:16-17

“Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

HEBREWS 11:6

<sup>1</sup>H. L. Mencken, *Prejudices: Third Series* (New York: Knopf, 1922), 267.

<sup>2</sup>Bertrand Russell, *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954), 215.

## Going Deeper

1. When we consider the Gospel story, Alistair says, “we’re either involved in the greatest con trick the world has ever seen, or we’re dealing in the matter of historical reality.” Why must Christians be ready to say that the Gospel is historically true?

2. What danger is represented in presenting the Gospel to our neighbors as a matter of personal belief rather than as a matter of historical truth?

3. The shepherds might be regarded as the Bible’s first evangelists. What actions did they take that can be described as evangelism? What motivated them to take that action?

4. *Revelation* is a word that describes God making known what had previously been unknown and unknowable. How is revelation an essential part of the nativity story?

5. Regarding the response to the shepherds’ message, Luke tells us, “All who heard it wondered” (v. 18). What about their message is wonderful? Do you personally feel that wonder?

6. Luke writes, "Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart" (v. 19). What Mary saw and heard at the beginning of Jesus' life made a difference in how she thought about its end. What does she show us about how faith works as time goes on and circumstances change?

7. Consider the faith of the different people in this story. How does it compare with your own experience of faith? What encouragement can their example offer you?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Upon a life I have not lived,  
Upon a death I did not die,  
Another's life, another's death,  
I stake my whole eternity.

Not on the tears which I have shed,  
Not on the sorrows I have known,  
Another's tears, another's griefs,  
On these I rest, on these alone.

Lord, I believe; oh, deal with me  
As one who has Thy Word believed!  
I take the gift; oh, look on me  
As one who has Thy gift received.

**"UPON A LIFE I HAVE NOT LIVED"**  
**BY HORATIUS BONAR**

# SESSION SIX

“Nunc Dimittis” | Luke 2:29–32

## Getting Started

A common children’s prayer goes, “Now I lay me down to sleep; I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to keep. And if I die before I wake, I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to take.”

How often in your prayers do you meditate on the topic of your death? What insights can such meditations bring you?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

LUKE 2:29–32

“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

1 THESSALONIANS 4:16–18

## Going Deeper

1. Luke describes Simeon as “waiting for the consolation of Israel.” What is “the consolation of Israel”? (See Isa. 40:1-5.) How was Simeon’s waiting for it an expression of his faith?

2. What did Simeon have to say about his own death? (See Luke 2:29.) What about the appearing of the infant Jesus allowed him to say this?

3. When Simeon addressed God as “Lord,” the Greek word is not the usual *kurios* but rather *despotēs*, from which we get the English word *despot*. How did Simeon seem to think about God’s sovereignty over his life? How was that an expression of his faith?

4. Mary and Joseph did not receive daily letters from God, but they did have God’s instructions in the Bible. What is the value in obeying the instructions God has already given as we wait to see what He will accomplish? How is this an expression of faith?

5. In what respect is Jesus to be “glory to ... Israel” (Luke 2:32)? (See John 4:22; Rom. 3:1-2.) And in what respect is Jesus to be “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (v. 32)? (See Isa. 49:6.)

6. As you consider Jesus during the Christmas season, are you able to celebrate God’s salvation as Simeon did? What step of faith is necessary for you to be able to say, “Now I may depart in peace”?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Just as I am, without one plea  
But that Thy blood was shed for me  
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am and waiting not  
To rid my soul of one dark blot,  
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about  
With many a conflict, many a doubt,  
Fightings and fears within, without,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

**“JUST AS I AM, WITHOUT ONE PLEA”**

**BY CHARLOTTE ELLIOTT**

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