



high school group study



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general editor



the life of **Jesus**



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how to use the *uncommon* group bible studies

Each *Uncommon* Group Bible Study contains 12 sessions, which are divided into 3 stand-alone units of 4 sessions each. You may choose to teach all 12 sessions consecutively, to use just one unit or to present individual sessions. You know your group, so do what works best for you and your students.

This is your leader's guidebook for teaching your group. Electronic files (in PDF format) of each session's student handouts are available for download at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/. The handouts include the "message," "dig," "apply," "reflect" and "meditation" sections of each study, formatted for easy printing. You may print as many copies as you need for your group.

Each session opens with a devotional meditation written for you, the youth leader. As hectic and trying as youth work is much of the time, it's important never to neglect your interior life. Use the devotions to refocus your heart and prepare yourself to share with kids the message that has already taken root in you. Each of the 12 sessions are divided into the following sections:

starter

Young people will stay in your youth group if they feel comfortable and make friends in the group. This section is designed for you and the students to get to know each other better.

message

The message section will introduce the Scripture reading for the session and get students thinking about how the passage applies to their lives.

dig

Many young people are biblically illiterate. In this section, students will dig into the Word of God and will begin to interact on a personal level with the concepts.

apply

Young people need the opportunity to think through the issues at hand. This section will get students talking about the passage of Scripture and interacting on important issues.

reflect

The conclusion to the study will allow students to reflect on some of the issues presented in the study on a more personal level.

meditation

A closing Scripture for the students to read and reflect on.



unit I

the beginnings

When I started this project on the life of Christ, I had no idea of the great impact it would have on me personally. Writing and teaching these studies on the life and events of Jesus Christ is one of the most challenging and wonderful experiences in my Christian life. While once again studying some of the major events in the life of Jesus, I am reminded of the unconditional and sacrificial love of God.

I love the old Russian proverb that says, “He who has this disease called Jesus Christ will never be cured.” I am convinced that if we seriously study the life of Jesus, we will never be the same. An encounter with Jesus Christ makes us different. Sometimes it makes us uncomfortable, revealing to us lives that have grown stagnant. At other times, it inspires us or gives us hope.

I once sat on the beach and watched a baby play in the sand. The little boy crawled around in the sand putting shells—along with anything else he could find—into his mouth. Eventually, he

wiggled out of his already wet diaper and played the rest of the afternoon innocently. Like every child, he was so vulnerable and totally dependent on his parents' care. And then it hit me—God did that for me! God in the form of a vulnerable baby came into the world so that humankind would have the opportunity to live. He could have done it through marching armies or spectacular displays of miraculous power, but instead He chose to become a helpless little baby, humble and dependent on His own mother.

God's love is incredible. The all-powerful God of the universe became a baby to incarnate His life on earth. He was willing to follow the ritual of the day and be baptized by His cousin John. He was willing to withstand 40 days of temptation in order for the plan of redemption to eventually be accomplished. Studying the life of Christ is being aware of the insanely generous love of God.

My prayer for you and your students is that as you examine these incredible occurrences in the life of Jesus, you will catch a greater glimpse of the depth of His love and the strength of His commitment to you. My hope is that you will fall more in love with this God/Man who humbled Himself and then suffered and died so that we might be set free.

Make it your prayer that as you tell the stories of Jesus, the students in your group will not just intellectualize the life of Christ but also be inspired toward deeper commitments as they experience Jesus anew.



session 1

**the birth of
Jesus Christ**

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

ISAIAH 9:2,6

Have you ever witnessed the wonderful and amazing process of a baby being born? Everyone who experiences the birth of a baby comes away with a new and refreshing perspective on life. Awe. Amazement. Tenderness. The miraculous birth of a child makes us different people.

So it is with the birth of Jesus Christ, the most miraculous birth of all. Jesus' coming into this world is surrounded by amazing miracles: His coming birth foretold hundreds of years before; the Holy Spirit coming upon a young, courageous teenager named

Mary; the amazing birth of His cousin John to a barren woman; the long journey of wise men following a bright and bold star; the startling, glorious appearance of thousands of singing angels praising God before a band of simple shepherds; the simple, humble, tender birth of the innocent Christ child.

The birth of Jesus Christ is a story that never gets old. It's a story that needs to be told and retold, experienced and lived in our hearts every day. Sure, everyone gets bombarded with the Yuletide Madison Avenue merchandising and materialistic media blitz, but nothing can dim or dampen the light of hope found in Jesus' coming to earth.

Although the students you work with may say they've heard the story a thousand times before, you can renew their fascination and appreciation for the birth of Christ by allowing the tenderness of His birth to touch your heart. Maybe it's time to teach this lesson in the maternity ward of a local hospital! Watching an innocent, newborn baby, your students will be amazed. Experiencing the new life found in Jesus Christ for themselves, your students will be transformed.

When we look at the manger we know how He loves us now, you and me, your family, and everybody's family with a tender love. And God loves us with a tender love. That is all that Jesus came to teach us, the tender love of God. "I have called you by your name, you are Mine."

MOTHER TERESA



group study guide

the birth of Jesus Christ

starter

BIRTHDAY SCRAMBLER: Have all members of the group stand in a single-file line. Without any talking or writing, the group must organize themselves by birth date—month and day only. Give the group a set time to complete the task. After a few minutes, check the group's accuracy by having each person announce his or her birthday.

message

The birth of Jesus is a mixture of grandeur and humility. The Son of God, the Savior of humankind, has come to the world. He has all power and all knowledge, but has come to spend time with us. Imagine that! Little ol' us.

Note: You can download this group study guide in 8½" x 11" format at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/the_life_of_jesus.zip.

At the same time, the King of kings and Lord of lords is born not to the highest-ranking couple in the land but to a lowly carpenter and his pregnant fiancée. And He doesn't come with the pomp and circumstance of a powerful king, but as a little baby, born in a barn surrounded by animals.

Why might Jesus have come to earth in such a quiet way? Why did He come as a baby when He could have come as a king?

Before we dig into the story of Jesus' birth, there are two pieces of the pre-story that we have to understand: (1) prophecies about Jesus' birth, and (2) what is called the "virgin birth."

Jesus' birth foretold

There are many amazing aspects to Jesus' birth, but one of the most astounding is that people had predicted it hundreds of years earlier. The Old Testament has a number of prophecies (predictions of the future) about the events and circumstances surrounding the birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. These prophecies were given to people by God hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus—and, what's more, *they came true*. Let's look at two of these prophecies about Jesus' birth and how they were fulfilled.

1. Look up the following Old Testament Scripture concerning the place of the birth of the Messiah and describe what the prophecy was. Then read the corresponding New Testament passage to find out how it was fulfilled.

Old Testament Prophecy—Micah 5:2

New Testament Fulfillment—Matthew 2:1-6

2. How does King Herod use this prophecy?

3. Look up the following Old Testament Scripture concerning the manner in which the Messiah would be born and describe what the prophecy was. Then read the corresponding New Testament passage to find out how it was fulfilled.

Old Testament Prophecy—Isaiah 7:14

New Testament Fulfillment—Matthew 1:18-23

4. How are Mary and Joseph involved in the fulfillment of this prophecy?

the virgin birth

This second prophecy listed above begins to talk about another important aspect of this story: the virgin birth of Jesus. To refresh your memory, Mary and Joseph were engaged to be married. Then Mary received a visit from an angel who told her that she was going to become pregnant and give birth to God’s Son, Jesus Christ. So she wasn’t married yet; she was a virgin, and yet she was going to give birth to the Son of God. Here’s Mary’s account of this event from Luke 1:30-38:

But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.”

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.

1. How does Mary react to the news of this incredible event?

2. What does this tell us about the kind of person Mary was?

While Mary may have demonstrated incredible faith and calmness, her fiancé, Joseph, initially didn't take the news so well. Read Joseph's account in Matthew 1:18-25:

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us."

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

3. What was Joseph's initial reaction?

4. What made him change his mind?

5. What do we learn about the kind of person Joseph is in these passages?

dig

Now let's read through the story of Jesus' birth. The events of His birth are told in two Gospels in the New Testament: Matthew

and Luke. We'll read the account of the birth of Jesus found in Luke 2:1-7. As you read, keep the following questions in mind: (1) Why were Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem? (2) What do you think Mary was thinking as she prepared to give birth?

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2:1-7).

1. After you have read these verses, take a moment to write down any questions that you might have.

- 2. We can see God’s hand in every aspect of Jesus’ birth. The prophecies said that the Messiah would be born in the town of Bethlehem, but Joseph and Mary were from Nazareth. How did Joseph and Mary end up in Bethlehem?

- 3. Although conditions may have been more primitive than today, most babies in Jesus’ day were not born in stables next to animals. If God planned this all out, why would He have had His Son born in such meager conditions?

Mary and Joseph get two sets of visitors after the birth of Jesus. The first was a set of shepherds. Continue reading Luke 2:8-20 to hear their story:

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to

them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

*“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”*

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

4. Angels appear to shepherds and tell them about the birth of Jesus. When the shepherds arrive, they find everything exactly as the angel had said. Why might the angel have appeared to a bunch of shepherds? Why not someone important or who had influence? (See verse 17 for help.)

The second visitors are referred to as the “Magi,” the “Wise Men” or the “Three Kings.” Now read the account of their visit as told in Matthew 2:1-12.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

*“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.”*

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they

were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

5. Why were the Magi in Bethlehem?

6. How did the Magi respond to Jesus?

7. The response of the Magi is incredible because not only is Jesus just a little baby at this point, but also because the Magi were a part of another religion. In fact, of all the people God could have chosen, the first people He has visit Jesus are a group of shepherds and three guys from a dis-

tant land who were members of a different religion. Why do you think this is?

apply

1. Think about Mary and Joseph. How would you respond if God asked you to do something incredible? If He nudged you to do something that maybe seemed crazy?

2. Think about the Magi. They traveled days and days and hundreds of miles to see Jesus. They endured hardship and difficulties just to see this little baby. How hard are you seeking Jesus in your life?

- 3. Christmas has become more and more about the presents under the tree and less about the presence of Jesus. How do you and your family strive to keep Jesus the center of the Christmas season?

reflect

- 1. Read John 3:17. Why was Jesus born on this earth?

- 2. If Jesus knew His purpose, why would He have come as a little helpless baby? Why not just come down from heaven as a full-grown man?

3. What would have been the impact if Jesus' arrival had received more fanfare? Or if Jesus had been born to a prominent couple? Or if the angels had appeared to rulers and priests instead of shepherds?

meditation



But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."

LUKE 2:10-11

who is Jesus and why does He matter?

Everybody's heard of Jesus Christ, but a surprising number of teens have only a vague idea about who He really is and why He is so important. Don't you think it's time to fix that? Now you can, with the help of *The Life of Jesus*, part of the *Uncommon* youth study series created by veteran youth minister Jim Burns. Twelve sessions of youth-friendly Bible study will bring the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus into focus and invite the teens in your group to take a long look at how He can make a difference in their lives. Plus, download reproducible student handouts and additional options for every session—find out how inside!

I don't know anyone who knows and understands the needs of the youth worker like Jim Burns.

DOUG FIELDS

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I heartily recommend these studies.

RICK WARREN

Author of *The Purpose Driven Life*



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