

## OVERVIEW

This lesson will help students recognize the depth of God's pursuit of us when he came to earth. Luke 2 emphasizes the low-profile nature of Jesus' arrival. Jesus is born among animals and peasants in an outpost of the Roman empire—not the anticipated landing site for the Creator of the universe. Not only does Jesus' birth show the extent of his pursuit, but it also demonstrates the humble nature of his Kingdom on earth, which would shock the Israelites, who were looking forward to a military leader who would rise against Rome. Students will compare Jesus' life and incarnation to a popular television show and movie in order to see how drastic God's pursuit is. Then they will be challenged to pursue God just as he has pursued them.

## TEACHING

### OPENING QUESTION

- Who do you most look forward to seeing at Christmas? Tell about one of your favorite memories together.

### WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT IT

By the time Jesus arrived in Bethlehem, God's people were on the brink of despair. They'd endured years of exile and finally returned home, only for Rome to come along and overrun their land. The Israelites were home, but they weren't free. It must have seemed to them that God had abandoned them or didn't care enough to save them from oppression. But that's when God stepped in to save the day—literally.

Read Luke 2:1–20.

**God stepped into human history.** Leaving his home in heaven, Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph as a baby—fully God and fully human. Jesus was born into time and space, helpless and dependent on the very humans he had created! Jesus obeyed God the Father every step of the way and wasn't concerned with fulfilling expectations set by others. God himself stepped into our story in order to write a better one than we could've imagined, saving his people spiritually from sin.

**God's pursuit of his people is often different than what we expect.** The Israelites expected their Savior to set them free in a political sense. God had made it clear that he would somehow forgive and restore his people, but the Israelites naturally expected a powerful ruler to step up and do the job. How could a helpless baby be the Savior? Because God often chooses to work in ways we don't expect. We also get a glimpse of Jesus' Kingdom when we see who heard the Good News first: shepherds. They weren't prestigious, but lowly. Yet in God's grace, they saw the Messiah first, and they believed! They witnessed their Savior, the one who would free them from spiritual death. Jesus isn't thinking about how popular a person is; he's pursuing people out of his love and grace, offering freedom from sin and making them like himself.

**FACILITATOR'S NOTE:** This lesson deals with the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, which can be tricky to explain. In its purest form, Christians believe that Jesus was **fully God** and **fully human**; he was **one person with two natures**. As paradoxical as it may seem, slipping on any of those four pieces gets into heresy pretty quickly. Here are some videos on the topic that might be helpful: *What is the Incarnation?*<sup>1</sup> and *How could Jesus be fully God and fully human?*<sup>2</sup>

## A SECOND LOOK

*Pick one of these illustrations to bring the topic to life:*

### **Option 1: With Us**

God was so intent in his pursuit of us that he entered our world as a human. CBS used to have a TV show called *Undercover Boss* where big-shot business executives would wear a disguise and try the more hands-on jobs their companies offered.<sup>3</sup> For example, the CEO of a waste disposal company might spend a few days riding the back of a garbage truck. Wealthy, powerful people would connect with the “little guys” to observe and appreciate all that happens to make their companies run. Jesus coming to earth was a bit like this TV show. For him to take a fully human form and live among regular people demonstrated the Kingdom he spoke of! God isn’t a far-off executive at the top of a tower. He cares about his people, and he wants to be with us.

### **DISCUSS:**

- How would it feel if your favorite celebrity took a real interest in you, offering help with school, getting meals together, etc.?
- How does it feel to know that God cares about you so much that he became human in order to offer you salvation?

### **Option 2: Jumping the Fence**

In some of the best stories, the protagonist doesn’t get what they want until they’re willing to change or give something up. In the movie *The Sandlot*, the neighborhood boys accidentally lost an autographed baseball behind the fence containing “The Beast”—an infamous, feared dog. Unsuccessful at retrieving the ball from a distance, they realized someone had to jump the fence and brave whatever danger may come. Benny, one of the boys, decided to give up his safety and comfort in order to retrieve their prized ball.<sup>4</sup> In a similar way, Jesus was willing to sacrifice the comforts of heaven—and more—to pursue us, his prized creation. Philippians 2 talks about God’s humility when he came to earth as a human. Jesus willingly suffered, died, and was raised to life so that we could be forgiven of our sins and spend eternity in God’s presence. We get to enjoy eternal life with God because Jesus was willing to “jump the fence.”

### **DISCUSS:**

- What did Jesus give up when he came to earth? (Read Phil. 2:6–8.)
- How can you follow Jesus’ example by sacrificing your comfort for the sake of someone else?

## THE TAKEAWAY

Jesus entering the world as a human baby shows the extent of God’s pursuit.

## APPLICATION

### DISCOVER

- Share about a time in your life when someone gave something up to be with you.

### THE BIBLE IN YOUR LIFE

God went above and beyond in pursuing his people by being born as a baby on earth. He humbly and willingly gave up the comforts of heaven to be with and pursue even the lowliest humans.

Read Luke 2:1–20, then answer the following questions.

### DISCUSS:

- Why do you think Jesus chose to be born in a stable, rather than a palace?
- How does it make you feel to know that God was willing to become human to pursue you?
- How is God pursuing you right now?

### APPLY IT

When we see what God has done to be with us, it makes us want to pursue him back through prayer, reading Scripture, and other spiritual disciplines. Decide on a spiritual discipline to practice this week more regularly with the intention of drawing near to and abiding in God.

#### BE SPECIFIC:

What are you going to do?

When are you going to do it?

Is there someone who can keep you accountable?

### PRAYER

Take time to let your students pray for each other's applications in the upcoming weeks.

### A QUOTE TO THINK ABOUT

"Because of immeasurable love, he became what we are to bring us to be even what he is himself." – Irenaeus of Lyons<sup>5</sup>

## THE TAKEAWAY

Jesus entering the world as a human baby shows the extent of God's pursuit.

## WAYS TO FOLLOW UP

Here are some tools that you can use to follow up with your students throughout the week. For example, send any of the graphics included in your download to your students later this week to keep the conversation going.

### MEMORY VERSE

"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."  
Philippians 2:5–8 (ESV)

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PHILIPPIANS 2:5–8 (ESV)



### MARK OF A DISCIPLE

Marks of a Disciple are a great way to figure out whether your students are growing in their understanding of God's story and how to connect it to their daily lives. As Scripture impacts your students' hearts, they'll begin to live differently and these Marks of a Disciple are a great guidepost to help them grow more Christ-like. Periodically check in with your students about one or two of these Marks of a Disciple that seem to be speaking to them specifically in this season.

Disciples of Christ recognize God planned on rescuing them before the foundation of the world.



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<sup>1</sup> Three Minute Theology, "3 Minute Theology 1.5: What is the Incarnation?," YouTube video, 3:29, Posted [February 6, 2015], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6XMn-yH71E>.

<sup>2</sup> Three Minute Theology, "3 Minute Theology 1.6: How could Jesus be fully God and fully human?," YouTube video, 3:29, Posted [February 13, 2015], [www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtoevOdB7m0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtoevOdB7m0).

<sup>3</sup> "Undercover Boss (American TV series)," *Wikipedia*, accessed May 1, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Undercover\\_Boss\\_\(American\\_TV\\_series\)&direction=prev&oldid=955294143](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Undercover_Boss_(American_TV_series)&direction=prev&oldid=955294143).

<sup>4</sup> *The Sandlot*, directed by David Mickey Evans (1993: Los Angeles, CA: Twentieth Century Fox), Film.

<sup>5</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, quoted in Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 261.