



Listen to the Sounds!

By Shari Miller

At Christmas time, we can hear carols being sung, exclamations and shouts of joy and delight, and the rustling and tearing of gift wrapping. During this Bible study, we will look at the Christmas Gospel in Luke 2. As we review the miracle and wonder of our Savior's birth, our focus will be on the sounds of Christmas heard during the holy night of Jesus' birth.

Share with a partner or small group a favorite Christmas carol and why it is your favorite.

NOTE: Please do not use the "if time permits" sections when study session time is limited. These sections could be done by the participant in private.

Opening Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, You created us and sustain our earthly lives with blessings and grace. Because of the perfect life, suffering, death, and resurrection of the Babe of Bethlehem, we rejoice in the forgiveness we have in Him. You give us Your Holy Spirit who gives us faith in Jesus as our Savior and keeps us in that faith. Your Spirit emboldens us to tell the great Good News of salvation in Jesus alone to those in our broken and hurting world. We look forward to eternal life with You in the glories of heaven. Be with us as we study Your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Busy Town and Baby's Cry

Read **Luke 2:1–7**. When Mary and Joseph entered Bethlehem, they could have encountered the noise and bustle of a tiny town (300 to 1,000 residents) whose population had suddenly swelled for the census. What noises do you think they might have heard? _____

Why did both Mary and Joseph need to travel the approximately 90 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem? See **1 Samuel 17:12** and **Luke 1:26–27**. (Note: Jewish betrothal was more binding than a modern-day engagement and lasted about nine months. The families of both the man and woman signed a marriage contract at the time of betrothal.) _____

What promise had God made to David in **2 Samuel 7:16**? _____

What had the prophet Micah foretold in **Micah 5:2**? _____

In this bustling town of Bethlehem *and while they were there, the time came for her [Mary] to give birth* (Luke 2:6). Perhaps family and friends lived here and could have housed them, but as the New International Version states in Luke 2:7b: *there was no guest room available for them*. Since Mary was pregnant and about to deliver, they were asked to go to the stable — perhaps for privacy. What sounds might they have heard in the stable? What do you think the first cry of breath from Baby Jesus sounded like? _____

Faith Talk: Do we get so busy during the Advent and Christmas season that we fail to recognize the wonder of the birth of the Savior? _____

Name specific traditions or ways that you can focus on the Babe of Bethlehem's birth. _____

Bleating Sheep and Running Feet

Read **Luke 2:8**. List some characteristics of sheep according to the following Bible passages:

Isaiah 53:6a _____

Jeremiah 50:6a _____

Ezekiel 34:6 _____

Zechariah 10:2 _____

Matthew 9:36 _____

Why do you think that the Bible compares God's people to being like a sheep? _____

Faith Talk: What specific characteristics about sheep can you relate to in your spiritual life and why? _____

The Bethlehem shepherds were probably Temple shepherds, making sure there would be unblemished lambs to sacrifice to God during the morning and evening sacrifices in the Jerusalem Temple not far away. They lived with their flocks in the fields just outside of Bethlehem. In Jesus' time, smelly shepherds had become unwanted, left out, and pushed to the side. They were social outcasts.

Faith Talk: Why do you think God would choose to first reveal the birth of His Son Jesus, the Savior of the world, to these lowly shepherds? _____

Read **Luke 2:15–16**. How did the shepherds respond to hearing about the Baby's birth? Imagine you were one of the shepherds on that night. How do you think you would have responded and why? _____

Faith Talk: Read **Luke 2:17**. Who first shared with you about the birth of Jesus? _____

Who in your life needs to hear about the birth of the Savior? _____

If time permits: Read **John 10:1–15**. Jesus says clearly in **John 10:11a**: *I am the good shepherd*. Compare the following duties of a shepherd with those that Jesus identifies as His in John 10. Be specific.

How does Jesus love and feed us? (**Psalm 23:1–2**; **100:3**)
How does Jesus lead and guide us? (See **Psalm 78:72** and **Isaiah 40:11**.) How does Jesus guard and protect us? (See **2 Thessalonians 3:3**.)

Celebration and Good News!

Read **Luke 2:9–14**; **20**. Who praises the Lord in the Christmas Gospel? _____

Look back to **Luke 1:44–55**. Mary, who has been told that she will be the mother of Jesus and has this confirmed while visiting her pregnant (with John the Baptist) relative Elizabeth, praises God in her Magnificat. Share specific phrases of praise and celebration that are meaningful to you.

Faith Talk: What was the Good News that the angels shared with the shepherds? Be specific. See **John 1:1–5**, **9-14**; **John 20:30–31**; and **1 Peter 1:25**. _____

Read **Romans 10:8–15**. How is the Good News of salvation in Jesus proclaimed and shared with "everyone, everywhere" today? _____

If time permits: God's Spirit engenders and strengthens faith in hearts through His Word, Holy Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Why is it important for Christians to be in the Word and participate in the Sacraments?

Read **Luke 2:19**. Mary pondered the wonder of her Son's birth. The familiar hymn, "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" (*LSB* 790:4), reminds us to "ponder anew what the Almighty can do." How can each one of us take the time to ponder anew the wonderful and awesome things of God?

Does it just come as a response to all God has done for us in Christ Jesus or must we schedule the time and place? A familiar prayer urges us to "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" God's Word. How is that done?

Faith Walk:

1. Celebrate the birth of the Baby Jesus. Take advantage of Advent/Christmas worship and fellowship opportunities.
2. Praise God for His daily blessings to you, especially His mercy and grace.
3. Enabled by the Holy Spirit, share the Good News about Jesus and what that means to you with someone special in your life.
4. Ponder anew the wonders of our awesome God and the hope that you have of eternal life in Christ the Lord.

Closing Prayer: Sing or speak together "Joy to the World" (*LSB* #387; *LW* #53; *TLH* #87).

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