



## Listen to the Sounds!

*Leader's Notes and Bible Passages*

*(Please do NOT use the "if time permits" sections when your study session time is limited. These sections could possibly be done by the participant in private.)*

Share with a partner or the small group a favorite Christmas carol and why it is your favorite. **Answers will vary, but encourage everyone to share. Make it clear that everything confided within the group stays within the group. The leader should give an example of her own to begin discussion.**

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.

**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**.

<sup>1</sup>In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>And all went to be registered, each to his own town. <sup>4</sup>And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, <sup>5</sup>to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. <sup>6</sup>And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

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?

**Answers may vary, but encourage everyone to share.**

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.)

**Joseph was a descendant of David, as was Mary. Bethlehem was David's hometown.**

**1 Samuel 17:12:** <sup>12</sup>Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons. In the days of Saul the man was already old and advanced in years.

**Luke 1:26–27:** <sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

What promise had God made to David in **2 Samuel 7:16**? **The throne of David would be established forever — Jesus would be a descendant of David.**

**2 Samuel 7:16:** <sup>16</sup>"... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."

What had the prophet **Micah** foretold in chapter **5:2**? **Bethlehem would be the birthplace of Jesus.**

**Micah 5:2:** <sup>2</sup>But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

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? **Possibly animals — cow, sheep, donkey, horse. The sounds of labor that would still have been difficult for Mary (because of the curse).** What do you think the first cry of breath from Baby Jesus sounded like? **Like any other baby — He was a human baby — that first crying gasp of air. Compare to the Christmas carol that states “no crying He makes.”**

**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. **Answers may vary, but encourage everyone to share.**

## Bleating Sheep and Running Feet

**Read Luke 2:8.**

<sup>8</sup> **And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.**

List some characteristics of sheep according to the following Bible passages:

**Isaiah 53:6a** **Sheep can wander aimlessly and are stubborn and self-centered.**

<sup>6</sup> **All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way ...**

**Jeremiah 50:6a** **Sheep get lost.**

<sup>6</sup> **“My people have been lost sheep.**

**Ezekiel 34:6** **Sheep like to wander away from the path; tend to stray.**

<sup>6</sup> **they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.**

**Zechariah 10:2** **Sheep follow whomever appears to be the leader, even if false; wander; afflicted.**

<sup>2</sup> **For the household gods utter nonsense, and the diviners see lies; they tell false dreams and give empty consolation. Therefore the people wander like sheep; they are afflicted for lack of a shepherd.**

**Matthew 9:36** **Sheep are harassed; helpless.**

<sup>36</sup> **When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.**

Why do you think that the Bible compares God’s people to being like a sheep? **As sinful — yet forgiven in Christ — people we still have most or all of these sheep characteristics. We need the Good Shepherd!**

**Faith Talk:** What specific characteristics about sheep can you relate to in your spiritual life and why? **Answers may vary, but encourage everyone to share.**

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? **Answers may vary, but encourage everyone to share.**

**Read Luke 2:15–16.**

<sup>15</sup> **When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”** <sup>16</sup> **And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.**

How did the shepherds respond to hearing about the Baby’s birth? **They immediately went to see what had happened.** Imagine you were one of the shepherds on that night. How do you think you would have responded and why? **Answers may vary, but encourage everyone to share. Answers could include worshipping the Baby; responding to the Child in wonder and awe; smiling; maybe singing.**

## Read Luke 2:17.

<sup>17</sup> And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

**Faith Talk:** Who first shared with you about the birth of Jesus? Who in your life needs to hear about the birth of the Savior? **Answers may vary, but encourage everyone to share.**

## If time permits: Read John 10:1–15.

<sup>1</sup> "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." <sup>6</sup> This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. <sup>7</sup> So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup> I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. <sup>11</sup> I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup> He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Jesus says clearly in John 10:11a: *I am the good shepherd*. Compare the following duties of a shepherd with those that Jesus identifies are His in John 10. Be specific.

1. How does Jesus love and feed us? (See also **Psalm 23:1–2; 100:3**.)

**Loves us by being our Savior; has compassion; knows us by name; peace with God and man; made us; sustains us; gives us eternal life.**

**Psalm 23:1-2:** <sup>1</sup>The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. <sup>2</sup>He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

**Psalm 100:3:** <sup>3</sup>Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

2. How does Jesus lead and guide us? (See also **Psalm 78:72; Isaiah 40:11**.)

**Word and Sacraments; fellowship with other Christians; He is right there with us showing us the path and leading us to heaven.**

**Isaiah 40:11:** <sup>11</sup>He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

**Psalm 78:72:** <sup>72</sup>With upright heart he shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand.

3. How does Jesus guard and protect us? (See also **2 Thessalonians 3:3**.)

**Helps us to withstand temptation and attacks from the devil, the world, and our own sin; lays down His life for His sheep; continues to intercede for us with the Father until we gain eternal life.**

**2 Thessalonians 3:3:** <sup>3</sup>But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.

## Celebration and Good News!

### Read Luke 2:9–14; 20.

<sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. <sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

<sup>20</sup> And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Who praises the Lord in the Christmas Gospel? **Both the angels and the shepherds.**

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.

**Answers may vary, but encourage everyone to share.**

**Luke 1:46-55:** <sup>46</sup> And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup> for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; <sup>49</sup> for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. <sup>50</sup> And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; <sup>52</sup> he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; <sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, <sup>55</sup> as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

List various reasons and ways to *praise the Lord* in **Psalm 150**?

**Psalm 150:** Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! <sup>2</sup> Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness! <sup>3</sup> Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! <sup>4</sup> Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! <sup>5</sup> Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! <sup>6</sup> Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

**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**. **The Savior of the world had been born; the long-awaited Messiah; the Anointed One; true God and true Man. He came to fulfill God's plan of salvation for the world through His perfect life, suffering, death, and resurrection. He is the Word made flesh, Life, and Light. The Word is written that we might believe. The Word is forever!**

**John 1:1-5, 9-14:** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. <sup>9</sup> The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. <sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

**John 20:30-31:** <sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

**1 Peter 1:25:** <sup>25</sup> ... but the word of the Lord remains forever. And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

Read **Romans 10:8-15**. How is the Good News of salvation in Jesus proclaimed and shared with "everyone, everywhere" today? **Through the spoken and written Word; by the power of the Spirit, we evangelize and are emboldened to confess our faith in Jesus.**

**Romans 10:8-15:** <sup>8</sup> But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); <sup>9</sup> because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. <sup>11</sup> For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." <sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. <sup>13</sup> For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." <sup>14</sup> How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? <sup>15</sup> And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

**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? **We honor both the command and the promise of Christ our Savior, and we need the strengthening, enlightenment, and sanctification the Holy Spirit provides through His Means of Grace.**

Read **Luke 2:19**.

<sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

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?

**Answers may vary, but encourage everyone to share.**

***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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