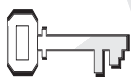


The Best Gift of All



References

Luke 2:1–7; Genesis 3:15; Psalm 132:11; Micah 5:2; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 43–49 (see also pages 50–58)



Memory Verse

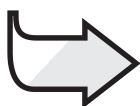
“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV).



Objectives

The children will:
Know that Jesus is God’s gift of grace, which brings us hope and joy.

Feel grateful that God gave Jesus to us.
Respond by accepting God’s gift of Jesus.



The Message

Jesus is God’s special gift to me.

Monthly Theme

God’s grace gives us hope and joy.

The Bible Lesson at a Glance

This lesson tells the familiar story of Jesus’ birth as recorded in Luke 2. A gift from God, the fulfillment of the hope of ages, Jesus comes as a baby, bringing joy to His parents and to all generations that follow.

This is a lesson about grace.

It is THE story about grace. Jesus gave up the wonders of heaven to come to earth to live and die for us. We can follow His example by sharing the good news with others. This will bring us, as well as others, hope and joy.

Teacher Enrichment

As tribal genealogy meant so much to the Jews, it is understandable that Herod decided that enrollment by tribe was the best option in Judea.

Neither Jewish nor Roman law would have required Mary to go with Joseph. Roman law required women to register, but not to appear in person. It may be that Mary, knowing that her baby was due shortly and that the prophecy said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, decided to go with Joseph. Possibly they were instructed to go. Bethlehem is about five miles south of Jerusalem. Today it is inhabited almost exclusively by Arab Christians.

Swaddling Clothes—At birth Hebrew children were washed in water and rubbed in salt, and loose strips of cloth were wrapped around the baby. Usually babies were laid diagonally on the square piece of cloth, two corners folded over their body, one over their feet, and the other under their head. This was held in place by bands of cloth loosely wound around the outside. (See *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 697, 698.)

Room Decorations

See Lesson 10.

Program Overview

Lesson Section	Minutes	Activities	Materials Needed
Welcome	ongoing	Greet students at door; hear pleased/troubled	none
1 Readiness Activities	up to 10	A. <i>Guess Who</i> B. <i>God's Present</i>	baby pictures of children in your class, paper, pencils Bible, gift wrap, food, item from nature, picture of family, gift tags, baby doll
Any Time Prayer and Praise*	up to 10	Fellowship Songbook Mission Offering Prayer	none <i>Sing for Joy</i> <i>Children's Mission</i> gift box strips of cloth, markers, manger
2 Bible Lesson	up to 20	Experiencing the Story Memory Verse Bible Study	Bible-times costumes, cloak, manger, flash cards, baby doll, strips of cloth from prayer time, stable props (optional) none Bibles
3 Applying the Lesson	up to 15	A. <i>My Gift</i> B. <i>God's Greatest Gift</i>	small boxes, gift wrap, gift tags, tape, markers card stock, glue, aluminum foil, scissors, markers
4 Sharing the Lesson	up to 15	A. <i>Christmas Project</i> B. <i>Birth Announcement</i>	information on community Christmas project paper, markers/chalk, crayons, white/chalkboard

*Prayer and Praise may be used at any time during the program.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Welcome

Welcome students at the door. Ask how their week has been—what they are pleased/troubled about. Encourage them to share any experiences from last week's lesson study. Have them begin the readiness activity of your choice.

1

Readiness Activities

Select the activity most appropriate for your situation.

You Need:

- baby pictures of the children
- paper
- pencils

A. Guess Who

In advance, collect baby pictures of the children. Number them and put them on a table or on the wall. Say: **Look at the pictures and write down who you think the babies are.** Allow time, then tell the children who the pictures are.

Debriefing

Ask: **How many got all of them right? Which was the most difficult to identify? Which was the easiest?** Say: **Babies are special to God. And you are special to Him too. You are so special that God sent His Son Jesus to this earth as a very special gift of love. Our memory verse tells us, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Our message says:**



JESUS IS GOD'S SPECIAL GIFT TO ME.

Say that with me.

You Need:

- Bible
- gift wrap
- gift tags
- food
- item from nature
- picture of family
- baby doll

B. God's Present

In advance, gift wrap some of the items listed in the "You Need" box or choose other things that are more appropriate to your situation. Attach a gift tag to the outside of each present. Write GRACE on each gift tag. Inside the last present have the word *Jesus* or a baby doll. Invite the children to open the gifts. (Save the baby doll for last.)

Debriefing

Ask: **Does everyone in the world have all of these gifts?** (No, some do not have food, clothes, or families.) **Which gift can everyone have?** (Jesus) **How does it make you feel to know that God gave you, and everyone in the world, the very best gift He could give?** (happy, pleased, grateful, etc.) Say: **Our memory verse tells us, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Our message is:**



JESUS IS GOD'S SPECIAL GIFT TO ME.

Say that with me.

Prayer and Praise

Any Time



Fellowship

Report the students' joys and sorrows (pleased and troubled) as reported to you at the door (as appropriate). Allow time for sharing experiences from last week's lesson study and review the memory verse. Acknowledge any birthdays, special events, or achievements. Give a special, warm greeting to all visitors.



Suggested Songs

- "Away In a Manger" (*Sing for Joy*, no. 74)
- "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly" (*Sing for Joy*, no. 75)
- "O Come, All Ye Faithful" (*Sing for Joy*, no. 70)
- "Silent Night, Holy Night" (*Sing for Joy*, no. 76)
- "Now Is Born the Divine Christ Child" (*Sing for Joy*, no. 78)



Mission

Share a story from *Children's Mission*. Emphasize that Jesus is God's special gift to everyone, no matter where they live.



Offering

Say: **It is fun to receive gifts. What happens if you receive a gift and keep it for yourself? (After a while it is not so much fun.) God has given us many wonderful gifts. Giving our offerings is one way of sharing the gifts God has given us and teaching others about His love.**

You Need:

- gift box from Lesson 10



Prayer

Give each child a strip of cloth. Say: **In Bible times newborn babies were wrapped in strips of cloth that may have looked like these. On your strip, write or draw something for which you want to thank God. When you finish, place your cloth by the manger.**

Gather the children around the manger and pray. Have the children name their prayer requests. Thank God for the wonderful gift of Jesus.

You Need:

- strips of cloth
- markers
- manger

2

Bible Lesson

You Need:

- Bible-times costumes
- cloak
- manger
- stable props (optional)
- flash cards
- baby doll
- strips of cloth from prayer time

Experiencing the Story

Characters: Mary, Joseph, innkeeper

Ask the three main characters to mime their parts as the story is read.

Divide the class into two groups. Have an adult lead each group by doing actions and holding up flash cards on which directions are written. Before class, make the following flash cards:

1. Group 1 walks one way. Group 2 walks the other way.
2. Group 1 moans to each other. Group 2 laughs.
3. Both groups sit down.
4. Groups alternate in saying, "Sorry, no room. Try down the road."
5. Groups make animal sounds: horse, goat, lamb, cow, chicken. Perhaps it happened like this.

Read or tell the story.

The roads were crowded with travelers. Caesar Augustus' decree that everyone had to go to their hometown to register was causing traffic jams everywhere. Rich caravans with camels and horses pushed aside poorer people walking or taking turns riding on the family donkey. *[Mary and Joseph trudge along. Group 1 walks one way. Group 2 walks the other way creating a crowd.]*

Some people were complaining, "The Romans are making us register so they can force us to pay even more taxes to Caesar." "It's ridiculous to make us all go back to the town our families came from. Why couldn't we register where we live?" *[Group 1 moans to each other. Group 2 laughs.]* Others were happy, laughing, and looking forward to seeing friends and family.

Both Mary and Joseph were descendants of King David, so they had to go from Nazareth to David's city, Bethlehem. They made their way through the noisy crowds. Mary was so tired and uncomfortable. It was almost time for her baby to be born. Joseph walked beside her, guiding the donkey she rode on.

Finally they came to the top of a hill and looked down on Bethlehem. *[Mary and Joseph look happy and point. Both groups sit down.]* They were so happy and relieved. At last they could rest. It was getting late as they went through the city gates. They knocked at the first inn. *[Make knocking sound. Mary and Joseph mime knocking on door. Repeat several times. Have the groups alternate in responding by saying, "Sorry, no room. Try down the road."]*

"Sorry, no room. Try down the road."

They moved on. The response was the same everywhere. Some were nice. Others were not. And the answer was always the same: "Sorry, no room. Try down the road."

Mary and Joseph were becoming desperate. They had to have somewhere to stay. *[Look around. Mime knocking on door. The innkeeper comes out, shakes his head and points to stable.]* At last an innkeeper took pity on them. He did not have any rooms, but he said they could sleep in the stable behind the inn.

Mary and Joseph made their way to the back of the inn. There wasn't much light. Even in the darkness they could see it was a very simple place. It smelled of hay and animals. Joseph looked at Mary. She was exhausted. It was not much, but at least it was shelter from the wind and the cold night air.

As they entered, the animals shifted restlessly, looking around to see who was coming in. The innkeeper's cow moored

softly. *[Both groups make animal sounds.]* Nearby were donkeys that belonged to other travelers. They pushed and jostled as Mary's donkey joined them. Somewhere in the darkness a mother hen clucked a warning not to come too close.

Joseph may have tried to find some fresh sweet-smelling hay, laid his cloak on top, and made a soft bed for Mary. *[Joseph mimes pulling out hay and placing a cloak on the floor.]*

There in the stable, Baby Jesus was born. Mary wrapped Him loosely in long strips of cloth called swaddling cloth. *[Use the strips of cloth from prayer time to wrap up a baby doll.]* Mary looked around. Where could her baby sleep? She did not have a crib. *[Mary rocks a baby doll and looks around.]*

Joseph found the solution. He saw a manger where animal feed was usually placed. Quickly he emptied out the old grain and filled the manger with clean hay. *[Bring the manger near.]* Mary gently laid Baby Jesus there. The Savior of the world, God's gift of grace to you and me, had been born.

Debriefing

Ask: **What would you do if you had no place to stay?**

How would you have felt if you had been Mary or Joseph? (worried, frightened)

What do you think of when you think of a stable? (animals, smells, dirt, hay) **How would you like to sleep with animals? What do you think the stable smelled like?** (not very good)

Why was there no room in the inns for Mary and Joseph? (Many people had gone to Bethlehem for the census.) **Were those people looking for Jesus?** (Probably not, even though the Jews looked for a Messiah, a Savior, to come to them. Some had read the prophecies and were looking for the

Messiah, but most were not. People were not prepared for Jesus.)

Say: **By learning about Jesus' birth, we can be ready to meet Him when He comes back. And He will come back for us. He keeps His promises.**

Let's say our message together:



JESUS IS GOD'S SPECIAL GIFT TO ME.

Memory Verse

Repeat the memory verse several times. Use the actions each time.

For God so loved the world	Point upward. Hand over heart. Make circle with hands.
that he gave	Point upward. Stretch out hand as if giving something.
his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.	Hold up one finger.
John 3:16	Point to forehead.
	Point upward.
	Shake head.
	Jump for joy.
	Palms together, then open.

Bible Study

Say: **When Adam had to leave the Garden of Eden because he disobeyed God, God had a plan to make things right again. He would give us the best gift of all, the gift of His Son. God told people of His plans. Let's use our Bibles to discover some of the things He said.**

Form six groups. Give each group one of the texts that follow. Allow time to read the verse and decide what it means. Ask each group to read their text to the class and tell what it means.

You Need:

- Bibles

Adults may assist as needed.

Isaiah 16:5 house of David
 Jeremiah 33:15 line of David
 Isaiah 7:14 son of a virgin
 Isaiah 9:6, 7 Child is born.
 Called Wonderful,
 Counselor, Mighty
 God, Everlasting
 Father, Prince of
 Peace.

Isaiah 53:2 He would not be
 rich or have any-
 thing that would
 make people want
 to follow Him.

Micah 5:2 would be born in
Bethlehem

Debriefing

Ask: **What did you learn about Jesus? Why was it important that Jesus be born in Bethlehem?** (to fulfill prophecy) **Why was Jesus not born in a palace?** (He is King of kings, but was born in a poor home so Satan could not say that people followed Him because He was rich or had advantages.)

Say: **Because Jesus came, we can live with Him in heaven. Isn't that a wonderful gift? Let's say our message:**

 **JESUS IS GOD'S SPECIAL GIFT TO ME.**

3

Applying the Lesson

You Need:

- small box for each child
- gift wrap
- gift tags
- tape
- markers

A. My Gift

Help the children gift-wrap small boxes. Make gift tags to tape to each "gift" that say, "Jesus is God's gift to me."

Debriefing

Say: **These small gifts help remind us that God gives us gifts every day. What is the very best gift He gives us?** (Jesus) **Why?** (Because Jesus lived and died for us, we can one day go to heaven and live with Him.)

You can remember this special Gift from God every time you see your gift at home. Show your gift box to someone this week and tell them about Jesus. Tell them that Jesus loves you and He loves them too.

Let's say our message together:

 **JESUS IS GOD'S SPECIAL GIFT TO ME.**

B. God's Greatest Gift

Help each child make a mirror by cutting out a piece of foil and mounting it onto the card stock.

Around or under the mirror write: "For God so loved _____ that he gave his one and only Son, that [if] _____ believes in him _____ shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Debriefing

Allow response time as you say: **Put your name in the blank as we say the verse together. Did you know that God would have sent His Son if you were the only person in the world? What does God's gift mean to you? Let's say our message together:**

 **JESUS IS GOD'S SPECIAL GIFT TO ME.**

You Need:

- card stock
- glue
- aluminum foil
- scissors
- markers

Sharing the Lesson

A. Christmas Project

If you chose to do a Christmas project, discuss the progress your class is making. Continue to work on it. Make sure that everyone knows what they have to do. If possible, encourage children to work in pairs.

You Need:

- information about a community Christmas project

Debriefing

Ask: **What did you do on our project during the week?**

What do we need to do next this week?

Say: **It is very nice to get presents, but it makes us feel good when we give presents. When we help others, we show God how much we appreciate His gifts to us. Let's say our message together:**



JESUS IS GOD'S SPECIAL GIFT TO ME.

B. Birth Announcement

In advance, write on the chalkboard:

Announcing: Jesus.

Born: Bethlehem.

Parents: Mary and God.

Where: stable on the edge of town.

Have the children use this information to make a birth announcement.

You Need:

- paper
- markers/crayons/chalk
- white/chalkboard

Debriefing

Ask: **How do you feel when you hear good news?** (Excited; want to share it with others.)

What do you do when you get a present? (Show it to everyone. Tell people about it.)

Say: **Jesus is God's gift to us—the very best gift we can have. How can we share Him with others?** Allow discussion time.

One way is to use our birth announcement to share the story of Jesus' birth. With whom can you share the story this week? Let each child tell about a person they want to share their birth announcement with.

Let's say our message together:



JESUS IS GOD'S SPECIAL GIFT TO ME.

Closing

Gather the children in a circle around the manger. Thank God for the gift of His Son and ask Him to be with the children as they share the story of Jesus' birth with others.

The Best Gift of All

References

Luke 2:1–7; Genesis 3:15; Psalm 132:11; Micah 5:2; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 43–49 (see also pages 50–58)

Memory Verse

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV).

The Message

Jesus is God’s special gift to me.

Have you ever been in bed and not been able to sleep? What could you hear? Mom and Dad in another room? An owl hooting or dogs barking outside? The sound of traffic? There are all kinds of noises at night. What are the sounds you might have heard the night Jesus was born—the night all God’s promises came true? Imagine that you are there.

If you listen closely, you might hear the busy people passing by outside. Or the sounds of donkeys and horses neighing and shifting in their stalls. And the crackling hay as Joseph and Mary find a comfortable spot to lie down. You might even hear Joseph’s kind words as the baby is born. I’m sure you will hear the baby’s first cries.

Now look at the baby. He is like other babies: small, a tiny patch of dark hair on

His head, eyes closed. His feet



and arms reach through the air for the very first time. Look a little closer. That baby is Jesus!

Look around you. This is no place for Jesus to be born. This is a place full of donkeys and horses that belong to people staying at a nearby inn. It is dirty. If you look up, you might see birds’ nests in the rafters. You may even see a star peeking through the roof.

Watch closely now. Jesus is wrapped in a long cloth strip. He is rocked gently in Mary’s arms. And then Jesus is taken to a manger filled with hay, where He goes to sleep.

That doesn’t sound like the Son of God! That’s impossible! Surely no one would have to take care of God’s Son!

Before Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem, He was a promise. Just after Adam and Eve had sinned, God had promised them that someday a special Child would be born. That Baby would destroy Satan and all his temptations.

That wasn’t the only promise fulfilled that night. God had told David that one of his great-great-grandchildren would be the Messiah. Messiah means “Promised One.” Both Joseph and Mary were David’s descendants. God’s servant Micah had written that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. And He was.

In one day all of those promises came true! Jesus had lived in heaven. Angels adored Him. He was ruler of the universe. But He became a baby. He needed a mother and father to take care of Him. He slept in a place where animals usually ate.

Why? Jesus loved us too much to be separated from us. He wanted to live with us, so He could show us a way to live with Him. He had promises to keep. Promises to all of us. He said He would come again—and He will! Soon, very soon!

Daily Activities

Sabbath

- If possible, go for a walk near a farm. Stop and look at the animals. Where do they live? What do they eat? What does the farm smell like?
- Share your lesson with your family. What animals might have been in the stable when Jesus was born?
- Sing a song about animals. Then thank God for animals and the farmers who care for them.

Sunday

- Ask your mother for a strip of old cloth. Write the memory verse on it to remind you of the cloths Jesus was wrapped in. Don't forget to include the reference. Teach the memory verse to your family.
- Look at some pictures of baby clothes. How are they different from swaddling cloths?
- During family worship, look at some of your baby pictures. Ask your family: Why was Baby Jesus so important?
- Thank God for the gift of His Son.

Monday

- During family worship, read and discuss Luke 2:1–7. Look on a Bible map to find Nazareth and Bethlehem. Measure the distance between the two towns. Use a map of your country to find another town that is the same distance from yours. How could you get there? How long would it take to walk? With your parents, try walking one mile.
- Thank God you can move from place to place.

Tuesday

- Read Luke 2:1–3 during family worship. Why did Mary and Joseph have to go to Bethlehem?
- Trace a map of your country. On it, mark the different places your aunts, uncles, and grandparents live. How do you travel when you go to see them?

- God gave us the gift of His Son. And we can give gifts to others. What can you give others that does not cost money? Plan to do something today. Ask God to bless your gift.

Wednesday

- Ask your family: How many different sounds might you have heard in the stable? Practice making some sounds. See if your family can guess what they are.
- Use chairs and cushions to create a stable. Imagine that you are one of the animals. Would you go and sniff at the manger? Would you look for food there?
- Sing "Away in a Manger" (*Sing for Joy*, no. 74) together. Then pray for newborn babies and small children you know.

Thursday

- Try to put your memory verse to music. Make up your own tune or use a tune you know. Teach it to your family.
- During family worship, read and discuss 1 Corinthians 12:8–10. What nine gifts are mentioned there? What are we to do with them? Ask your family what gifts from God they have used this week.
- Pray that each family member will accept and use God's gifts.

Friday

- For family worship, create a stable with chairs and cushions. Then read Luke 2:1–7. Ask your family what God's gift of Jesus means to them. What does it mean to you?
- Sing or say your memory verse together. Then sing favorite Christmas songs.
- Thank God for sending His Son, Jesus, to be our Savior. Pray that He will help everyone in your family to be ready when Jesus comes again.