

# Re-imagining Life



## Session 5: Whole-Life Breaking In

This session moves us away from the creation account to the life of Jesus. We spent the first sessions looking at the world we live in. We will now turn our attention to the significance of Jesus' life and death and resurrection.

We need to take seriously the fact that God did not just announce good news through a heavenly loud hailer. God took on flesh and came amongst us. This has massive implications for us as Christians. For example, it means we have to think about how we take part in mission. It also points us to a profound truth about Jesus – having been born as a man, he is able to empathise with us in our struggles (Hebrews 2:14-18, 4:14-16). His willingness to humble himself also serves as an example for us in our relationships (Philippians 2:1-11). There's a lot to think about. You will not have time to cover everything, so we want you to centre on how Jesus' birth helps us to understand how we get involved in telling others about the good news. The work of becoming a whole-life disciple happens when we get involved in living out our faith in our everyday lives and then respond to the inevitable questions that come our way. For those of us who are trying to live as whole-life disciples, there is much to be intrigued by and challenged by.

Look at the number of times in Luke 2 the word 'saviour' or 'salvation' is used. For Christians these words have come to refer to personal, individual events. We know that we have been saved from the consequences of our sins and, therefore, can have a personal relationship with God, but how would the first visitors have heard this news.

For them, conscious of the oppression of the Roman superpower, they would see this baby as the hope for the nation. Jesus' birth was not simply a 'religious' event – it was the beginning of a social revolution. Nothing would be the same again. If God had come amongst them, then they had to rethink everything. That is still the case for us – if God has come to planet earth and walked on our streets, what does that mean for those of us involved in education, the health service, childcare, business, property etc.? If nothing is outside of God's control and concern, how do we make sense of how God wants to use us?

## Luke 2

<sup>1</sup>In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup>(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup>And everyone went to his own town to register.

<sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup>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.

<sup>8</sup>And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup>An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

<sup>13</sup>Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests."

<sup>15</sup>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."

<sup>16</sup>So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup>and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

## Notice

### **As you read, notice these features:**

*The reference to the Roman authorities places this event in a real place and a real time. But it also reminds us that the great world empire was able to pull people around as it wanted. It was the great power.*

*Except: behind the scenes, it was only doing what God wanted in the first place.*

*And where 'good news of great joy' was an announcement of the enthronement of a new Caesar, this would now be said of the birth of a new King.*

*Shepherds began to have a bad reputation in Palestine – ritually unclean, ethically unreliable. It's interesting that the angels came to them first.*

*Note the angelic message: In David's town – reminder of the great King;*

*A Saviour – a liberator;*

*Christ – Messiah, the one that would prepare people for the final Day of the Lord;*

*The Lord – the title used of God.*

*And notice the 'host' (army) of angels.*

*Compare all this with the paradox of a baby lying in a feeding trough.*

## Reflect

By only concentrating on the account of the incarnation at Christmas, what truths do you think we might miss that would be relevant for our everyday lives?

Why is it significant that Jesus was born in the normal way, as a real human?

What difference does it make to you that God was born as a human?

Do you find it difficult to believe that Jesus was truly human, in the same way as we are?

Luke seems at pains to point out that God works at a particular time, in a particular place, when particular politicians are in place. Why is this important to him and why could it be important to us?

For whom would the announcement of Jesus birth have been particularly good news? Why?

Do you think the announcement would have been understood as a threat to the existing rulers? How would it have been a threat? Would rulers still feel threatened by Jesus?

What would be good news for them? How can we live out this good news?

Notice how Jesus was born – of a miraculous conception but a natural birth. Some have suggested that the story reminds us that everything is holy. God takes on flesh like us – and reminds us of our relationship to God. There is no area that is out of his touch.



## Word for the Week

### Power, status and being human

**So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar... Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. John 4:5-7**

The story of Jesus and the woman of Samaria provides rich teaching, – on evangelism, gender and ethnicity issues, genuine worship – but the implications of the first few verses are often overlooked.

These two were on their own. The disciples were off looking for lunch. The woman was making a solitary trip to the well at noon. Between them lay cultural barriers of status that would normally rule out any kind of genuine communication. He was a rabbi, a man and a Jew. He was also the Lord of Creation, the promised Messiah. He was tired, hot, hungry and thirsty. *She* may well have been kept by some man as an unloved drudge. She expected him to stand up and walk away leaving her until she had finished her solitary task.

But he didn't. He didn't hide his vulnerability and need – he was thirsty and the well was deep. He didn't pull rank and he didn't insist on his status. He had already faced that temptation. Beginning '**if** you are the Son of God', the tempter had suggested that if Jesus *did* have the authority, then as he was hungry, he should turn stones into bread. And if people didn't realise who he was, then he should demonstrate his divinity so that all could see. But he chose not to go that way.

How much is status worth to *us*? How difficult do we find it to allow others to see our weaknesses and our vulnerabilities, fearing that our authority will be diminished by such openness? Any one who has any kind of authority faces the temptation to ensure that everyone 'beneath' them knows the extent of that power, and that any weakness is well hidden.

Jesus stayed sitting on the wall of the well, and asked her for a drink. He put himself in her debt. Later he began to tell her who he really was and to startle her with his words of knowledge. But not before he had established that he was just another human being. In doing so he shocked her, and his disciples. What barriers do we need to break down today?

Margaret Killingray