



GOD'S CREATURES TELL THE STORY

The Nativity Report

Teacher's Packet

FREE ♦ PHOTOCOPY FREELY FOR YOUR CLASS

Five lesson plans, discussion questions for two age bands, a new reproducible Bible Detective worksheet, a new ten-question quiz with answer key, background notes that sort out what the text says from what the Christmas card says, and an Advent-ready family section. Built for readers ages 11–17 from the full narrative of *The Nativity Report*.

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How to Use This Packet

Three tracks, one book. Pick the one that matches your setting and ignore the other two. Everything here may be photocopied for your own class or family.

Track One — Advent (four weeks)

- This is the one book in the series with an obvious season. Read a section a week through December, or a chapter a night from the first Sunday of Advent.
- Close each reading with one question from page 4, chosen for the age at your table.
- The devotion starters on page 6 are written to be used once a week for four weeks.

Track Two — Sunday School (four weeks)

- **Week 1 — The Announcement.** Gabriel comes to a teenage girl in a town nobody respected, and she says yes before she knows what it will cost.
- **Week 2 — The Righteous Dilemma.** Joseph decides to protect Mary quietly at his own expense, and then changes his whole life on the strength of a dream.
- **Week 3 — The Birth.** A census, a journey, a place among the animals, and the first announcement made to men whose testimony would not stand up in court.
- **Week 4 — The Flight.** Magi from the east, a paranoid king, and a family that becomes a refugee family before the child can walk.

Track Three — Homeschool (across subjects)

- **History.** Rome, Herod the Great, and what a census was actually for.
- **Literature.** Two Gospels tell this story and they do not tell the same parts. Compare Matthew 1–2 with Luke 1–2 side by side.
- **Geography.** Nazareth to Bethlehem to Egypt and back — measure all three legs.
- **Music.** Mary’s song in Luke 1:46–55 is a political document as much as a hymn. Read it against Hannah’s song in 1 Samuel 2.
- **Writing.** An innkeeper who does not appear in the Bible. See page 7.

A NOTE ON THE AGE BANDS

This packet is banded 11–13 and 14–17. The book’s own “For Parents and Teachers” section bands its appendices at 6–8, 9–11, and 12+; where the two differ, follow the packet. That section also refers twice to “Appendix 3 (The Upside-Down Kingdom)” when the Upside-Down Kingdom is Appendix 4 — if you are sending students to an appendix by number, check the number first.

Before the First Session

- Read page 8. Several things everyone knows about the nativity are not in the Bible, and students find that far more interesting than being told the familiar version again.
- Photocopy pages 5 and 9 — one per student. Everything else is for you.

Five Lesson Plans

Each lesson names a key verse, the reading, one main point, and one activity that can be done in the room. The lessons require the book; the verses are ones the narrative itself puts on the page.

1. The Yes That Changed Everything

READ The Visitation and The Yes · **KEY VERSE** *Luke 1:38*

Main point: Mary was young, poor, engaged, and from a town with no reputation. She asks one practical question and then agrees, knowing the cost will fall on her before it falls on anyone else. Her yes is not naive; she has counted it.

Activity: Read Luke 1:34 and note that she asks *how*, not *whether*. Then compare with Zechariah's question in 1:18 and ask what makes the two questions different.

2. The Righteous Dilemma

READ The Righteous Dilemma and The Night Visitor · **KEY VERSE** *Matthew 1:19*

Main point: Joseph believes he has been betrayed and still looks for the option that costs Mary least, at his own expense. Matthew calls him righteous *for that*, before any angel appears. Then he obeys a dream and takes on public shame that was never his.

Activity: List Joseph's options as he understood them that night. Then ask what "righteous" means in this verse, given what he chose.

3. Mary's Song

READ The Recognition and The Song of Mary · **KEY VERSE** *Luke 1:52–53*

Main point: Mary's song is not gentle. Rulers pulled from thrones, the humble lifted, the hungry filled, the rich sent away empty. A pregnant teenager sings about the overturning of the whole social order, and she sings it in the past tense as though it is already done.

Activity: Read Luke 1:46–55 next to Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:1–10. Mark every line where they rhyme in thought.

4. Announced to Shepherds

READ The birth and the shepherds · **KEY VERSE** *Luke 2:10–12*

Main point: The single most important announcement in history was delivered to night-shift laborers on a hillside. In that world shepherds were not respected and their word carried little weight. God tells them first anyway, and the sign He gives is a feeding trough.

Activity: Ask who the announcement would go to today if the same principle held. Take real answers and let the room be uncomfortable with them.

5. A Refugee Family

READ The Midnight Departure and The Journey into Exile · **KEY VERSE** *Matthew 2:13–15*

Main point: The story does not end at the manger. Wise men arrive at a house, not a stable, and their arrival triggers a massacre. Joseph wakes his family in the dark and runs for a foreign country. God's Son begins His life as a refugee.

Activity: Trace the family's route on a map: Nazareth, Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth again. Ask how long each leg would take on foot with an infant.

Discussion Questions

Choose three or four per session. Most students have heard this story since they were small, which makes it the hardest one in the series to hear freshly.

AGES 11–13

1. Mary was probably not much older than you are. Does that change how you picture her?
2. Mary asked God a question before she agreed. Is asking questions the opposite of faith?
3. Joseph planned to end the engagement quietly so Mary would not be shamed publicly. What does that tell you about him, before he ever hears from an angel?
4. The angels announced the birth to shepherds working the night shift. Why not to the priests or the king?
5. The sign the angel gave was a baby lying in a feeding trough. What kind of sign is that?
6. Herod was so frightened of a baby that he sent soldiers. What was he actually afraid of?
7. Jesus' family had to flee to another country to keep Him safe. How does that change the way the Christmas story feels?
8. Mary sang a song about proud people being brought down and hungry people being fed. Is that the kind of song you expected?
9. Elizabeth was old and Mary was young, and they spent three months together. What do you think they talked about?

AGES 14–17

1. Matthew and Luke tell this story differently and include different scenes. Set them side by side. What does each writer seem most interested in?
2. Matthew calls Joseph righteous specifically for planning to divorce Mary quietly. What definition of righteousness is being used there?
3. Mary's song describes rulers being pulled down and the rich sent away empty. Is the Magnificat a political statement? What would it have sounded like to a Roman?
4. The announcement went to shepherds, whose testimony carried little legal weight. If you were inventing a religion, would you write that scene? What follows from that?
5. Isaiah 7:14 was spoken to King Ahaz about his own crisis, seven centuries earlier. How can it be both about Ahaz's day and about Jesus?
6. Herod's killing of the children in Bethlehem is in the same chapter as the wise men. Why do you think Christmas retellings almost always stop before it?
7. God chose an unmarried pregnant teenager in an occupied province rather than a palace. What is being argued by that choice, and what does it ask of us?
8. The incarnation claims Jesus was fully God and fully human at once. What is gained if that is true, and what is lost if He was only one or the other?

Bible Detective

“A good reporter checks the story everyone thinks they know.” — Penny the Squirrel. Answer from the Bible, not from memory. Answer key on page 10.

NAME _____ DATE _____ SCORE _____ / 9

1. What was the angel's name, and what town was Mary living in? (*Luke 1:26–27*)

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2. What question did Mary ask the angel, and what did she say last? (*Luke 1:34, 38*)

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3. What did Joseph plan to do before the angel came to him — and why? (*Matthew 1:19*)

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4. What does the name Jesus mean, and who chose it? (*Matthew 1:21*)

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5. Why did Joseph and Mary travel to Bethlehem? (*Luke 2:1–5*)

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6. What sign did the angel give the shepherds so they would know they had found the right baby? (*Luke 2:12*)

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7. **Challenge.** How many wise men does the Bible say came? Count carefully. (*Matthew 2:1–11*)

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8. **Challenge.** Where were Mary and the child when the wise men arrived, and what did the family do next? (*Matthew 2:11–14*)

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9. **Super Sleuth.** Name three things in a typical nativity scene that the Bible does not actually mention.

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Family and At-Home

Four devotion starters — one for each week of Advent — a prayer, and one application. None of these require a craft table or more than fifteen minutes.

DEVOTION STARTERS

Week One — Saying yes first. Mary agreed before she knew what it would cost her, and it cost her a great deal. Ask what our family has said yes to without knowing the whole price. Read Luke 1:38.

Week Two — Quiet decency. Joseph looked for the option that would hurt Mary least, while believing she had wronged him. Ask where each of us could choose the quieter, kinder version of being right. Read Matthew 1:19.

Week Three — Told first. The announcement went to shepherds, not officials. Ask who our family tends to overlook, and what it means that God started there. Read Luke 2:8–14.

Week Four — A trough for a sign. The proof offered to the shepherds was a baby in a feeding box. Ask what our family treats as evidence that God is at work, and whether we would have recognized this. Read Luke 2:12–16.

MEMORY VERSES

- *Luke 1:38* — let it be to me according to your word.
- *Luke 2:11* — unto you is born this day a Savior.
- *Matthew 1:23* — they shall call his name Immanuel, God with us.
- *John 1:14* — the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

A FAMILY PRAYER

Father, You did not arrive the way anyone expected. You came to a young woman nobody had heard of, in a town nobody respected, and You told shepherds before You told kings. Give us that kind of attention for the people the world overlooks. Give us Joseph's quiet decency and Mary's willing yes. And keep us from being so used to this story that we stop hearing it. In Jesus' name, amen.

APPLICATION FOR THE SEASON

Mary's song says the hungry are filled and the rich sent away empty. Choose one thing this family would ordinarily spend on itself this December and spend it on someone who cannot return the favor. Decide the amount before you decide the recipient, so the amount is honest. Then read Luke 1:52–53 out loud on the day you do it.

One more, for any week of the year: read Matthew 1–2 and Luke 1–2 aloud in a single sitting, without stopping and without a carol playing. It takes about twelve minutes. Most families have only ever heard this story in fragments, and hearing it whole is different.

Activities and Projects

Ordinary household supplies only — two Bibles, a map, a nativity set you already own. Nothing here needs a craft store.

AGES 11–13

Audit the Nativity Set. *Supplies: the set on your shelf.* Take every figure out and sort them into two piles: in the Bible, and not in the Bible. Use Matthew 2 and Luke 2 to decide. The second pile is usually bigger than anyone expects, and page 8 explains each one.

Two Gospels, Two Columns. *Supplies: paper.* Read Matthew 1–2 and Luke 1–2 and list what appears in each. Circle the scenes that appear in only one. Then ask why two writers telling one story chose such different parts of it.

Measure the Journeys. *Supplies: a map app.* Nazareth to Bethlehem is about ninety miles by the usual routes. Bethlehem to Egypt is considerably farther. Work out the walking days for each with a pregnant woman, and then with a newborn.

Sing the Theology. *Supplies: the words to three carols.* Print the lyrics and mark every line that states something the Bible actually says, every line that adds detail, and every line that is simply wrong. Carols are where most people learn this story, which makes them worth reading closely.

The Genealogy Nobody Reads. *Supplies: Matthew 1:1–17.* Read the whole list aloud, taking turns. Then find the four women in it and look up what each one is known for. Matthew did not have to include any of them.

AGES 14–17

The Innkeeper Who Isn't There. *Supplies: paper.* No innkeeper appears anywhere in Scripture — he is entirely a later addition. Write eight hundred words explaining why he was invented, what he does for the story, and what is lost when he is there.

Two Songs. *Supplies: Luke 1:46–55 and 1 Samuel 2:1–10.* Map every point where Mary's song echoes Hannah's. Then write five hundred words on what Mary was doing by singing an old song about a barren woman's vindication.

Prophecy, Carefully. *Supplies: Isaiah 7:14 in context, Hosea 11:1 in context, Matthew 1:23 and 2:15.* Read each Old Testament passage in its own setting first. Then read how Matthew uses it. Write a page on what "fulfillment" means when the original passage was clearly about something in its own time as well.

Fully Both. *Supplies: the book's appendix on the two natures, plus John 1:1–14 and Philippians 2:5–11.* Write five hundred words on what the incarnation claims and why it matters that Jesus is not half of each. Then name one thing in the nativity account that only makes sense if the claim is true.

Check the Chart. *Supplies: the book's Appendix 1.* One row in the prophecy chart lists no Old Testament reference at all, only the word "implied." Find it. Then decide whether a chart of fulfilled prophecies is stronger or weaker for including a row like that, and say why in three sentences.

For the Teacher

Background you will want before a sharp fourteen-year-old asks. Most of this page is about the difference between the Bible and the Christmas card.

WHAT IS NOT IN THE TEXT

No innkeeper. No stable — only a manger, which implies animals but not a building; a lower room or a cave are both plausible. No number of wise men; three is inferred from three gifts. No camels, no names, no kings — Matthew calls them *magi*, scholars from the east. And the wise men arrive at a *house* (Matthew 2:11), possibly a year or more later, not at the manger the same night. None of this weakens the account. Students consistently find the real version more interesting.

THE INN THAT MAY BE A GUEST ROOM

The Greek word in Luke 2:7 is *kataluma*, which Luke elsewhere uses for a guest room — it is the word for the upper room in Luke 22:11. Many read the verse as saying there was no space in the family guest room, so the child was laid where the animals were fed. That is a reading, not a certainty, but it fits Luke’s vocabulary better than a commercial inn.

SHEPHERDS

Not a romantic profession. Shepherds worked outdoors at night, were ritually inconvenient, and their testimony carried little social weight. The first announcement of the incarnation went to men whose word would not have been taken seriously in a dispute. That is the point of the scene, and it is worth stating plainly rather than sentimentalizing.

ISAIAH 7:14 AND HOW PROPHECY WORKS HERE

Isaiah spoke that verse to King Ahaz about a crisis in his own lifetime, and Matthew applies it to Jesus. Both are true at once: many Old Testament passages have a near horizon and a far one. The same is true of Hosea 11:1, which in context is about Israel coming out of Egypt and which Matthew reads as pointing forward. Teaching this well protects students who will later encounter the objection.

ON THE PROPHECY CHART IN APPENDIX 1

Two things to know before assigning it. The row for “announced to shepherds” gives no Old Testament citation, only “implied in shepherd imagery” — that is not a prophecy and it is the weakest row on an otherwise solid chart. And the probability calculation at the end comes from Peter Stoner, whose figures were his own estimates rather than measured data; it has been criticized on exactly that ground. The prophecies themselves are the strong argument. The arithmetic on top of them is not, and saying “this proves” will lose you the one student in the room who checks.

HEROD, AND THE DATING

Herod the Great died in 4 BC, which is why most scholars place the birth a few years earlier than the calendar suggests — the sixth-century monk who set our numbering was off by several years. Herod’s violence toward perceived rivals, including members of his own family, is documented outside Scripture, which makes Matthew 2:16 grimly in character.

IF A STUDENT ASKS ABOUT THE CHILDREN OF BETHLEHEM

They may, especially if they read Matthew 2 rather than a retelling. Say it plainly: Herod ordered the killing of the boys in a small village, and the family fled. Bethlehem was tiny, so the number was probably small — which does not make it less terrible. The honest note is that this story includes real grief from the beginning, and that Matthew quotes Jeremiah about weeping rather than explaining it away.

Professor Hoot's Quiz

Ten questions. Circle one answer for each. Scoring guide and answer key on page 10.

NAME _____ DATE _____ SCORE _____ / 10

1. Which angel came to Mary?
a) Michael b) Gabriel c) Raphael
2. What town was Mary living in when the angel came?
a) Bethlehem b) Jerusalem c) Nazareth
3. What did Joseph intend to do before the angel appeared to him?
a) Divorce Mary quietly b) Accuse her publicly c) Leave the country
4. What does the name Jesus mean?
a) God with us b) The Lord saves c) Prince of peace
5. Why did the family travel to Bethlehem?
a) For a festival b) To visit relatives c) For a census
6. Who heard the announcement of the birth first?
a) Shepherds in the fields b) The priests in Jerusalem c) King Herod
7. What sign did the angel give them?
a) A star over the town b) A baby lying in a manger c) A voice from heaven
8. How many wise men does the Bible name?
a) Three b) Twelve c) It never says
9. Where were Mary and the child when the wise men arrived?
a) In a stable b) In a house c) On the road
10. Where did the family flee to escape Herod?
a) Egypt b) Galilee c) Syria

Bonus. Name one thing people usually put in the Christmas story that the Bible does not mention, and say where you think it came from.

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Answer Keys and Where to Go Next

QUIZ ANSWER KEY — PAGE 9

1	b — Gabriel	6	a — shepherds
2	c — Nazareth	7	b — a baby in a manger
3	a — divorce her quietly	8	c — it never says
4	b — the Lord saves	9	b — in a house
5	c — a census	10	a — Egypt

Bonus. Accept the innkeeper, the stable as a building, three wise men, their names, camels, or kings. Most come from later carols, art, and tradition rather than from Matthew or Luke.

BIBLE DETECTIVE ANSWER KEY — PAGE 5

- Gabriel; Nazareth in Galilee (*Luke 1:26–27*).
- “How will this be?” — and she finished with “let it be to me according to your word” (*1:34, 38*).
- Divorce her quietly, because he was righteous and did not want her disgraced publicly (*Matthew 1:19*).
- “The Lord saves” — the angel gave the name before the birth (*1:21*).
- A census ordered by Caesar Augustus; Joseph went to his ancestral town (*Luke 2:1–5*).
- A baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger (*2:12*).
- The Bible never says. Three gifts are named, not three men (*Matthew 2:11*).
- In a house; afterward the family fled to Egypt by night (*2:11–14*).
- Any three of: an innkeeper, a stable building, three wise men, camels, kings, the wise men present at the birth, or a specific date.

SCORING GUIDE

9–10 correct — Senior Correspondent. Reading the text rather than the Christmas card.

7–8 correct — Field Reporter. Solid. Send them back for the two they missed and let them find the verse themselves.

5–6 correct — Cub Reporter. The familiar version won. Re-read Matthew 2 straight through.

Under 5 — Back to the Newsroom. Not a failing grade. Read the book together rather than assigning it.

WHERE TO GO NEXT — MORE FREE DOWNLOADS

- **The Six Sacred Rules of Divine Reporting** — one-page classroom poster.
- **Meet the Divine News Team** — one page, four character cards.
- Teacher’s Packets for every other title in the series — including **Ruth and Boaz**, which ends in the same town this book begins in.
- **52 Questions: A Year of Family Bible Conversations** — one a week, from across the series. Coming soon.

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