



## RockPointe Small Groups

The Advent of Christ • The Birth of Jesus • Luke 2:1-7 • 12/08/2019

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### MAIN POINT

The birth of Jesus gives us a window into the relentless nature of the love of God.

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### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What is the longest you've ever waited to receive something you've been promised, and what was it?**

**How did you feel when the promise was finally fulfilled?**

**How do you handle the waiting process? Do you get impatient and take matters into your own hands? Do you grow apathetic and try to forget about what you were promised?**

Waiting isn't easy for anyone, but that doesn't mean it's meaningless. Mary and Joseph waited nine months for their promised child to be born, but the people of Israel had been waiting centuries for their promised Messiah, God's anointed Savior. God had been waiting too, for just the right time, to display His relentless love with the birth of Jesus.

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### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**Have a volunteer read Luke 2:1-7.**

The simplicity of Luke's record of the Messiah's birth stands in sharp contrast to the tremendous significance of that event. Luke's record, in addition to setting the historical context, reveals God's powerful providence at work. God worked through the plans of government officials to bring Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem for Jesus' birth.

**Read Micah 5:2. How did God use the Roman government in bringing about Jesus' birth and fulfilling Micah's prophecy about the Messiah?**

**What do we learn about God's work in the world through this detail?**

The emperor Caesar Augustus reigned over the Roman Empire more than 40 years. His rule ended in

A.D. 14. During his long reign, Caesar Augustus provided a period of calm and a permanent organization of his empire that later facilitated the spread of Christianity. Caesar Augustus decreed that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. Such a census required the entry of information—including one's name, occupation, and property—into the public registers.

**How do you think Mary and Joseph felt about the timing of the census?**

**First Corinthians 13 tells us first of all that love is patient. How does God model patient love for us through this scene?**

After Mary and Joseph's arrival in Bethlehem, the time came for the baby to be born. Mary laid her newborn Child in a manger, an animal's feeding trough, because there was no room in the inn. An inn, probably an overnight lodging place for caravans, would provide primitive shelter at best. There was no room in this public place, however, because of the crowds for the census. This account of Jesus' birth reflects a situation of poverty and powerlessness. The Messiah humbled Himself in ways beyond our comprehension (Phil. 2:6-8). The intensity of God's love for us is seen in the lengths to which He went to draw us back to Himself.

**How do you see the true nature of love modeled from Mary, Joseph, and even God in the details surrounding Jesus' birth?**

**What is the takeaway for you when you think about displaying this kind of love toward others?**

**Have a volunteer read 1 John 4:7-11.**

John explained that not only is God the source and standard of love; He is love. Love originates with God, and He is consistent and perfect in expressing love and supplying to us the love we are to show others. Through the cross of Christ, we see God's passionate pursuit of us, His love on display.

**Based on these verses, what is the biblical meaning of love?**

**God showed His love for us by sending His Son to be the sacrifice for our sins. What insight does this give us into how God expects us to show love to others?**

**What happens to our efforts to love each other if those efforts aren't connected to Jesus' love for us?**

God did more than shout down from heaven, "I love you!" to the people on earth. He demonstrated His love by sending Jesus to die on the cross. That's the nature of love—it's more than mere emotion or sentiment. True love is intentional and action-oriented. When we begin to grasp the depth of Jesus' love for us, we will find ourselves freed to love each other in that same sacrificial and intentional kind of way. This is what Jesus calls us to when He commands us to love purposefully.

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## **APPLICATION**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Why do you think love is such a defining mark of the Christian? Do we tend to think of love as the primary mark of the Christian life? If not, what do we think of as that mark? Why?**

**What most frequently stands in the way of you truly loving others?**

**What are some tangible expressions of this kind of love you might practice during this season of life?**

**What obstacles or fears do you normally face when sharing both your faith in Christ and the experiences in your relationship with Him?**

## Why can God's love for you trump any fears you may have?

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### PRAYER

Close by asking God to perfect His love in you and help you better appreciate Jesus' sacrificial act of love on your behalf. Pray for the opportunity to put your Christlike love into action this week, and pray for love to become the mark for which our church is known in our community.

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### COMMENTARY

#### █ Luke 2:1-7

2:1-3. Luke's account of Jesus' birth story is unique. Not only did he write of John the Baptist's birth, but he alone recorded the actual birth event of Jesus (2:1-7). God works in and through history to accomplish His sovereign purposes. Luke illustrated this truth with the notation of a registration that occurred in the Roman empire during the reign of Caesar Augustus (2:1-2). At the time of this registration, everyone returned to his own town to be counted.

2:4. Luke intentionally emphasized that Joseph went to register in the city of King David's birth (see 1 Sam. 17:12). The timing of the registration and the requirement for Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem set Jesus' birth in a definite historical context. God used that context to fulfill the long-promised event of the Messiah's being born in Bethlehem (see Mic. 5:2).

2:6-7. After Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem, the time came for her to give birth. We cannot know the event's exact timing. Jesus, conceived by a miracle of God, resembled no other child. Mary treated Jesus as any mother might minister to a newborn. The fully divine Jesus also was fully human, needing the tender care of parents. Jesus' first earthly resting place also highlighted His human nature. A feeding trough used by nearby animals became Jesus' first crib.

#### █ 1 JOHN 4:7-12

4:7-8. The letter returns to a subject already talked about—love—which comes from God. If we want to be like God, we, too, must love. Love becomes another test of believers. Only those born of God know how to love. They know how because they know God, the only source of love. John has already made the point that the true child of God both loves and believes (3:23). Yet, even those who are not true children of God can love others—sometimes even more fully than many Christians—because we have all been created in the image of God. The capacity to love comes to us as part of divine creation. Yet, true love—love that includes loving God and the full expression of love for others, namely telling them about salvation in Jesus—is characteristic only of true Christians. Then John flipped the coin over, claiming that anyone who does not show love does not know God. The evidence of this? The nature of God. His very essence is love. Thus, this negative test seems easier to understand. How could someone receive divine life through Jesus, have the indwelling Holy Spirit, and not love? A person saved by love and indwelt with love must love. We may have trouble loving perfectly, but there is a big difference between not loving perfectly and not loving at all.

4:9-10. If we need to love as God loved, we might wonder how God loved. The clear answer appears in 3:16. Verse 9 says the same thing from the Father's perspective. God the Father showed how He loves. He sent his one and only Son, knowing He would be horribly treated and ultimately crucified. This is how God loved. He sacrificed His Son so we might live through Him. This immeasurable gift was in no way a response to humanity's love for God. Quite the opposite. It was initiated by God. We respond to Him. Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins. God solved our problem at His expense. He made Jesus our atoning sacrifice.

4:11-12. God set the standard of love for us. Since we are children of God, we should love other people, especially fellow believers, just as God loved us. The love He has for us is made visible and complete as we love one another. This is the way the world sees God's love, as it is expressed by Him through our lives. Only as God's love completes its purpose of reaching out to those He loves—the world (John 3:16)—is His love complete or fulfilled.