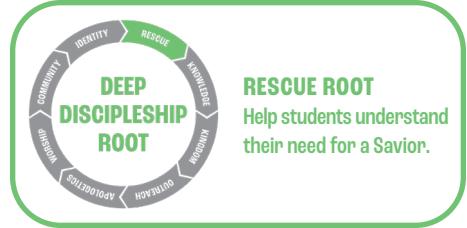


MARK OF A DISCIPLE

Disciples of Christ have access to the peace that surpasses all understanding.



SCRIPTURE

LUKE 2:8-20

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Shepherds. *Shepherds* were the first people to whom God sent his message of peace. They were some of the first ones to get a glimpse of Christ. Because of their work—living outside, managing livestock—shepherding was not the job most people wanted. They were pretty low in the social pecking order. They were both physically and ceremonially unclean. This disqualified them from worshiping in the temple or synagogue. Yet, they were able to worship Jesus in person soon after his birth.

Check out the Teacher Prep Video for this lesson: <https://vimeo.com/933477953>

OPENING

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

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MEDIA AS STUDENTS ARRIVE

1. Play background music (optional)
2. Display **SERIES TITLE** Slide and announcement slides in a loop or customize the provided **PowerPoint**.
3. Play a 5-minute Countdown Timer 5:00 minutes before you start.

GAME or ICE BREAKER

Based on your group's size, choose a **Game** from **Deep Discipleship Games** OR use the **Ice Breaker** prompt.

- **Game**—We recommend **Caroling with Suri** or choose another screen game from **Deep Discipleship Games**
- **Ice Breaker**— If you had unlimited funds to arrange one perfect, totally peaceful day for yourself, what would you do?

DEEP DISCIPLESHIP GAMES

Find free games in **Deep Discipleship Games**. It's already included with your Deep Discipleship subscription. View the game in advance in case you need supplies or slides.

WORSHIP

Craft a time of worship with a live band or sing along to a playlist.

- Check out our curated Spotify list. We understand that every church has a different theological view of worship. These songs are suggestions, please pick what works best for your church.
- <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2xmeIKGUjkEE7bJYSCbRwe?si=d254ec715a4749e5>

SLIDES (optional)

Use **SERIES Background & Blank Slides** or **PowerPoint** to create lyric slides.

TRANSITION TO MESSAGE

Include a brief element that transitions students from worship to teaching time, like a prayer or video. This will keep students focused and prepared for the message while the band leaves the stage.

VIDEO (optional)

Show **SERIES Promo Video** or **LESSON Intro Video** after the last worship song.

MESSAGE

Use the following teaching points and suggested illustrations as a starting point to build your message.

POINT 1: Great joy for all!

Read or have someone in your group read Luke 2:8-12

Have you ever stopped to think about how amazing it is that the greatest news ever told was first given to some cast-off, smelly workers who spent more time with sheep than other humans? God came to Earth, and the first people to find out were sheep wranglers! The story would make more sense, by our standards at least, if the angelic messengers made their announcement in the palace of a king or among the high-ranking priests in the temple.

If the message of the Messiah's arrival had occurred in Herod's palace or some other elite place, how long would it have taken for the news to reach the shepherds out in the fields? If the story was reversed, the shepherds would probably have been among the last to know.

The Gospel message is special because it's not for a select few. It isn't limited to society's elite. This is the Good News of great joy for all the people!

SLIDES (optional)

Use the **SERIES PowerPoint** OR the **Background & Blank Slides** to create these slides to support your message:

- Luke 2:8-12
- Point 1

POINT 2: Peace on Earth

Read or have someone in your group read Luke 2:13-15

To emphasize the importance of the angelic message, a crowd of angels filled the sky and sang, "Glory to God in the highest!" Delivering the most important message the Earth has ever known had to come with some serious splendor. The angels delivered an important message—*peace* had come to Earth, which meant great joy for all the people.

ILLUSTRATION: Have you ever been to a college football game? That kind of atmosphere is hard to fully explain, especially if you're an avid fan. When the home team scores a touchdown, the stadium erupts! The marching band blares, cheerleaders jump, fans scream. There might be fireworks or cannons or some other kind of exciting stunt. Touchdowns are the important things that happen in a game, but all the fanfare that follows a touchdown emphasizes how *awesome* everyone thinks it is.

The angelic chorus exploded in the night sky like the fanfare after the touchdown. Something amazing had happened! Earth would never be the same again!

SLIDES (optional)

- Luke 2:13-15
- Point 2



POINT 3: It's all true

Read or have someone in your group read Luke 2:16-20

The shepherds rushed from their posts in the field to see what had happened. Everything was just as the angels announced. In response to this amazing miracle, the shepherds praised God and told everyone what they had experienced. When the shepherds arrived, they saw the truth behind the angels' message. When they shared their story, Mary had even more affirmation of her divine pregnancy and all the angel Gabriel had foretold her. It was all true!

ILLUSTRATION: Tell a personal story about a time when seemingly supernatural circumstances or unexpected outcomes affirmed your faith. What happened? How did you respond? How did it affect your faith?

The angels said that a new peace had come to Earth. The baby in the manger proved their story, and all people had cause to rejoice.

SLIDES (optional)

- Luke 2:16-20
- Point 3

CLOSING

MARK OF A DISCIPLE

Disciples of Christ have access to the peace that surpasses all understanding.

SLIDES (optional)

- Mark of a Disciple

FACILITATOR NOTE: DO YOU HAVE SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION RIGHT AWAY?

- If YES, then **STOP HERE**, divide into groups, and provide Small Group Leaders with the **Small Group Breakout Questions** on the next page.
- If NO, then end your gathering with the **Reflect & Respond** questions and **Prayer** prompt below.

REFLECT & RESPOND

Give the students time to silently think through what they have heard and contemplate these questions:

- Have you heard the Good News of great joy? How have you responded to the Good News?
- Jesus brought a new peace to Earth. In what ways is that peace present in your life? In what ways are you caught up in the world's chaos?

SLIDES (optional)

Use the **SERIES PowerPoint** OR the **Background & Blank Slides** to display the **Reflect & Respond** questions.

FACILITATOR NOTE: Don't rush this part. Give the students a few minutes to consider the power of Christ's peace in our lives and how we can share it with the world!

PRAYER

Take time to pray your students will be able to trust God's plan over their own plans.



SMALL GROUP BREAKOUT (OPTIONAL)

Pick a few questions from each section to discuss. Close with prayer.

BREAKOUT QUESTIONS

Build Meaningful Relationships

- When have you experienced a moment of awe or wonder in your faith life? How did it affect you?
Answers will vary. Come prepared to share a story from your own life to help start the conversation.
- The shepherds immediately went to find Jesus after hearing the news. What can we learn from their sense of urgency and excitement?

The Gospel isn't a secondary priority—it's above all things! The shepherds went to Jesus straightaway because nothing else mattered in comparison. The same is still true for us!

Share Personal Stories & Ask Intentional Questions

- Why do you think God chose to reveal the birth of Jesus to shepherds, who were considered lowly by their society?
God raises up the lowly! It's part of God's character that we see throughout Scripture. The outcasts and overlooked are God's kind of people. Choosing the shepherds demonstrated that the message of Jesus is for all people.
- God chose to enter the world as a baby born in a stable. What does this teach us about God's values?
God demonstrated his power through humility! He wasn't born in a palace or to a wealthy family. We can learn much about what God values by reading the Gospels.
- Why do you think the angels sang about peace on Earth? What does that have to do with Jesus?
Jesus is the Prince of Peace! He brought the gift of peace with him, offering a peace that surpasses all understanding to his followers (Phil. 4:7).
- Verse 19 says that Mary "treasured up" the words of the shepherds and "pondered them in her heart." What does that mean?
We don't always have to understand things right away. Mary was face to face with a miracle and still figuring things out. We can grow spiritually through quiet meditation and reflection.

Make Life Application & Hold Students Accountable

- How can we maintain a sense of wonder and awe in our faith, especially amid the busyness and distractions of everyday life?
Lots of stuff wants to get in between us and Jesus. The first step is to acknowledge Jesus is the most important and to put him above everything else!
- The shepherds encountered Jesus and immediately began sharing the Good News with others. What does that mean for us today?
The shepherds were some of the first evangelists! They heard about the Good News of great joy for all people and knew they couldn't keep it to themselves. We might not be in Bethlehem, but we can still share the Good News with the people around us!

PRAYER

Take time to pray that the students will understand and experience the peace that comes from Christ.
Use this space to keep track of any prayer requests.

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