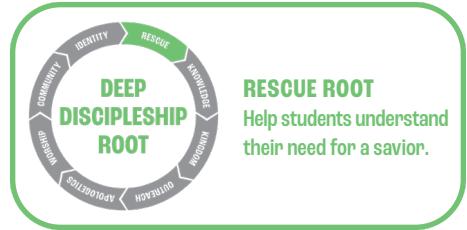


MARK OF A DISCIPLE

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>

FACILITATOR NOTE: We've giving you a lot of teaching material. Don't feel like you should cover everything here. You know your group better than anyone. Choose the material that will best fit your students and skip over the rest.

OPENING

PRAYER

1-2 minutes

Start your small group by asking the Lord to bless your discussion and time together.

OPTIONAL: Give students an opportunity to lead the prayer.

OPENING QUESTIONS

3-5 minutes

- How was the week? What's the best thing that's happened? Anything major going on?
- If you had unlimited funds to arrange one perfect, totally peaceful day for yourself, what would you do?



EXPLORE

EXPLORE GOD'S WORD

3-5 minutes

Today we are in the second lesson in the *Christmas Gifts* series. We will study the access we have to Christ's peace because of his birth. Instead of announcing the news to kings or high priests, a chorus of angels shared the Good News of Jesus' birth with some shepherds in a field outside of Bethlehem. The arrival of Christ the Lord meant peace and joy for *all* people, not just a select few. The shepherds responded to this miraculous event by telling everyone they met about this newborn Messiah! When we follow Jesus, we can be filled with the peace and joy he offers, and we should share it with everyone!



Read Luke 2:8–12 and discuss 1–2 of these questions:

7–10 minutes

- 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.



ASK INTENTIONAL QUESTIONS

- 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.

- When have you ever experienced a moment of awe or wonder in your faith life? How did it impact you? Answers will vary. Come prepared to share a story from your own life to help start the conversation.

Say something like: God came to Earth, and lowly sheep wranglers were the first people to find out. 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!

Read Luke 2:13–15 and discuss 1–2 of these questions:

7–10 minutes

- 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).



ASK INTENTIONAL QUESTIONS

- 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!

- Jesus brought peace to earth by providing all people a way back to a right relationship with God. Is that peace present in your life, or are you caught up in the world's chaos?

If we follow Jesus, we have a right relationship with God, so his peace should rule our lives over chaos. No matter what happens, we belong to God!

Say something like: The angels had an important message to deliver—*peace* had come to Earth, which meant great joy for all the people. It's the most important message the Earth has ever known, and they shared it with some serious splendor!

FACILITATOR NOTE: If you have extra time, go through the next set of questions. If not, skip to the **Connection** section.

Read Luke 2:16–20 and discuss 1–2 of these questions:

7–10 minutes

- 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.



ASK INTENTIONAL QUESTIONS

- 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!

Say something like: 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! 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.



CONNECT & APPLY

CONNECTION

5-7 minutes

Show your students how Scripture connects to their lives: Use the example below OR share a personal story of how you were inspired to share the Good News after an encounter with Jesus.



SHARE PERSONAL STORIES

Example: Have you ever been to a college football game? That kind of atmosphere is hard to explain fully, 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.

Christ's arrival on Earth was a *big deal*. It marked a new path to peace, joy, and life! 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!

- Jesus' birth was an amazing miracle. Does your life reflect the peace and joy he brings? Does it burst out of you with the same fanfare as the chorus of angels?

Answers will vary. It's not unnatural to become complacent in your faith life or fall into tired old habits. But Jesus' birth is exciting! Like the shepherds, we should respond to it with action and praise.

MARK OF A DISCIPLE

2-3 minutes

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

Use the Mark of a Disciple to reinforce the lesson and challenge students to apply it to their lives.



MAKE LIFE APPLICATION

APPLY IT

5-10 minutes

There is a lot that can get between you and Jesus. Busyness, distractions, and sin can separate us from Christ the Lord, who brings peace into chaos and joy into sorrow. What can you do to keep your eyes on Jesus, follow him closely, and spread his peace far and wide?



HOLD STUDENTS ACCOUNTABLE

Be specific:

- What are you going to do?
- When are you going to do it?
- Is there someone who can keep you accountable?

FACILITATOR NOTE: Allow students who are comfortable to share their plans for application. This may encourage or spark ideas for other students, plus add a level of accountability.



CLOSING

PRAYER

2-3 minutes

Take a moment to ask for prayer requests. Spend some time praying that the students will understand and experience the peace that comes from Christ.

Write down any prayer requests mentioned and ask your students about them at your next meeting.

MEMORY VERSE

Send the memory verse graphic included in your download to your students later this week to keep the conversation going.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:6-7 (ESV)

NOTES

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright ©2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. May not copy or download more than 500 consecutive verses of the ESV Bible or more than one half of any book of the ESV Bible.

Any reference within this piece to Internet addresses of websites not under the administration of LeaderTreks is not to be taken as an endorsement of these websites by LeaderTreks; neither does LeaderTreks vouch for their content.

