

Journey CHURCH

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Leader Guide

The Case for Christmas Session 1: Setting the Record Straight

Before you watch:

Pair-up with another group member, ideally someone you don't know that well, and briefly talk about the following questions:

- What's your favorite Christmas movie? Is there a favorite memory you can share of a time when you watched this movie with your family or friends?
- What is your family's tradition relating to opening Christmas presents? Does your family open on Christmas Eve or Christmas morning?
- Do you have a nativity scene that you display during this time of year? What does that scene look like without the stable or the wise men?

Video Teaching:

Notes: It would have been unthinkable in the first century for anyone to turn away a pregnant Jewish woman seeking shelter. The person who turned her away would be ostracized.

Luke specifically chose the Greek word *katalyma* in the account of Jesus' birth, which is best translated as "guest room". In fact, the *New International Version* translates Luke 2:7 as saying Mary placed Jesus in a manger "because there was no *guest room* available for them."

Luke says the time for Jesus to be born came "while they were there" in Bethlehem. Luke doesn't portray this as an emergency situation that arose as they approached the village.

What about the idea that Mary gave birth in a cave? Actually, the Gospels don't mention a cave at all. In fact, the idea of a cave can be traced back to Christian apologist Justin Martyr, who was writing much later- during the middle of the second century.

It's a legitimate question to ask whether we can trust the Gospel accounts. How do we know they are reliable? Can we be sure they are trustworthy when they describe birth, the teachings, the death, and- ultimately- the resurrection of Jesus?

Yes, for two reasons:

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First, they were written a lot closer to the events they describe than some critics claim. Second, archaeology has consistently affirmed the biblical record- to the point where Luke has been described by scholars as a first-rate historian.

We need to take seriously the historical record of the birth of Jesus. Because it's true, Christmas cannot be ignored. In the end, the child in the manger deserves our allegiance and our worship.

Group Discussion:

Once the video has concluded, break into small groups for a time of discussion. Don't be shy- grab your chair and circle up! Find someone who will become your partner over the next few weeks. It's best for women to choose women and men to choose men. Get your new partner's phone number so you can connect during the week.

1. Have you ever heard the teaching that Jesus wasn't refused a room at the "inn"? What struck you as the most significant point as that myth was debunked?
2. One scholar suggests Mary and Joseph could have been in Bethlehem "five minutes or five weeks" before the baby Jesus was born, emphasizing the point that wasn't necessarily any panic. Does that differ from how you have heard the Christmas story? Does it make a difference to you? *Share your impressions with the group.*
3. What are your thoughts about the reliability of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? Do you view their Gospel accounts as trustworthy, or do you have some questions and/or doubts? (It's okay if you do, because that's one of the reasons why you're meeting together this Christmas season. Share honestly!)
4. What other questions have you had about the reliability of Jesus' birth story as told in the Bible? How did this week's teaching help address these concerns? What other questions do you still have at this point that you want to express to the group?

Closing Prayer:

Conclude your group discussion time with a few minutes for prayer. Nothing will bring your group together quicker than knowing you have brothers and sisters who care enough about the issues you raise to bring them before the Lord for his answers and his direction.