Preschool–Grade 6

The Road to Bethlehem

Sunday School Lesson for 3rd to 5th Grade, 45–60 minutes

Main point: God keeps His promises exactly, and He rules over everything, even kings and rulers, so we can trust Him.
Bible passage: Luke 2:1–7 and Micah 5:2. Read them before class.
Memory verse: "And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)" *Luke 2:4 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each child (or one for every two children), an envelope, a card, a sticker for each child, a whiteboard or large paper, a marker, and one take-home sheet for each child.
Before class: hide the stickers somewhere in the room. On the card, write where they are hidden ("The stickers are under the blue chair"), seal the card in the envelope and set it on your table. Draw the road map for part 4 on the board.

1. Opening game: The Clue Written Ahead (5–10 minutes)

Hold up the sealed envelope and say: "I wrote something in here before you came today." Then kids hunt for the hidden stickers while you say "warmer" or "colder." When they find them, open the envelope and read the card out loud. Ask: *How did my card know where the stickers were?* (I planned it and wrote it down first.) Say: "Hundreds of years ahead, God wrote down where His promised ruler would come from. Today we will see Him keep that promise."

2. Bible story: God Brings Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem (15 minutes)

Kids open their Bibles to Luke 2. When you reach a **Look up** line, a child finds the verse and reads it out loud. Tell the rest in your own words.

The decree. Look up Luke 2:1. Caesar Augustus, the ruler of the Roman Empire, sent out a **decree**, an official order, that all the world should be **taxed**. That means everyone had to be counted and written down so they could be taxed. This taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria (2:2). **Look up Luke 2:3.** Everyone went to be taxed in his own city.

Joseph's family. Look up Luke 2:4. Joseph went up from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in **Judaea**, the southern part of the land. Why is Bethlehem called the city of David? King David came from there: David was the son of Jesse, "that Ephrathite of Beth-lehem-judah" (1 Samuel 17:12). **House and lineage** means family line. Joseph came from King David's family. An angel even called him "Joseph, thou son of David" (Matthew 1:20). Bethlehem is more than 60 miles south of Nazareth in a straight line, and it sits high in the hills, so the Bible says Joseph "went up." The Bible doesn't say how they traveled or how many days it took.

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Mary. Look up Luke 2:5. Mary was Joseph's **espoused** wife, which means promised in marriage, and she was **great with child**: her baby was coming soon. Months before, the angel Gabriel had come to Mary in Nazareth (Luke 1:26–27) and told her that her son would be called Jesus, and "the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:31–32).

God's promise. Look up Micah 5:2. Micah preached in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (Micah 1:1), about 700 years before Jesus was born. **Ephratah** is an old name for the Bethlehem area. "**Little among the thousands of Judah**" means a small town. God named it ahead of time! Caesar made his decree for his own reasons, but God was in charge the whole time. **Look up Proverbs 21:1.** "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD." God used Caesar's order to bring Joseph and Mary to the very town He had named.

In Bethlehem. Look up Luke 2:6–7. The days were accomplished means the time came for the baby to be born. Mary's **firstborn son** was born. She wrapped Him in **swaddling clothes**, strips of cloth wrapped snugly around a baby, and laid Him in a **manger**, a box that animals eat from, because there was no room for them in the inn. That baby was Jesus, the ruler God promised in Micah 5:2.

3. Questions to ask (10 minutes)

Thinking questions (no single right answer; let kids talk)

1. Caesar thought he was in charge of the whole world. Who was really in charge? How do Micah 5:2 and Proverbs 21:1 show it?
2. Joseph obeyed the decree and made the long trip, and Mary's baby was coming soon (Luke 2:4–5). What can we learn about obeying when it is not easy?
3. God made His promise about Bethlehem about 700 years before it happened. What does that tell you about how God keeps His word?
4. There was no room for them in the inn (2:7), but God's plan was right on time. When things don't go the way we want, how can we keep trusting God?
5. What other promises of God do you know?

Recall questions

1. Who was governor of Syria when this taxing was first made? *(Cyrenius, Luke 2:2)*
2. What town did Joseph leave, and in what land? *(Nazareth, in Galilee, 2:4)*
3. Why did Joseph go to Bethlehem? *(He was of the house and lineage of David, 2:4)*

4. Memory verse: The Road Map Verse (5 minutes)

On the board, draw a road from "Nazareth" at the top to "Bethlehem" at the bottom. Write the verse along the road in short parts. Explain the old words: **went up** means traveled up into the hills, **Galilee** is the land in the north where Nazareth was, **Judaea** is the land in the south where Bethlehem is, **unto** means to, and **house and lineage** means family line. Read the verse together. Erase the first part of the road and read it again. Keep erasing one part at a time, from Nazareth down to Bethlehem, until the class can say it alone.

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5. What this means for us (5 minutes)

Say: "God promised that the ruler of Israel would come from Bethlehem, and He kept His word, right on time. God loves you. The Bible says: 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). That means all of us have done wrong, and none of us is as good as God. The baby born in Bethlehem is God manifest in the flesh, which means God came to earth as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). When He grew up, Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). How do we obey the gospel? 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) To **repent** means to turn away from sin; our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are **buried with Jesus in baptism**, all the way under the water, in Jesus' name. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we come up to live a new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the **Holy Ghost**, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives the words (Acts 2:4). The Bible calls this being born again (John 3:5)."
Pray with the kids, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.
This week: when you are asked to do something that isn't easy, do it without complaining, like Joseph made the long trip. Trust that God is working.

6. Activity: Bible Look-Up Race (10–15 minutes)

Kids work in pairs with one Bible. Read a reference and a question. The first pair to find the verse and read the answer out loud wins the point.

1. Luke 2:1: Who sent out the decree? *(Caesar Augustus)*
2. Luke 2:2: Who was governor of Syria? *(Cyrenius)*
3. Luke 2:3: Where did everyone go to be taxed? *(Every one into his own city)*
4. Luke 1:26–27: What city was Mary in when the angel Gabriel came? *(Nazareth, a city of Galilee)*
5. 1 Samuel 17:12: Which king's father was from Bethlehem? *(David's father, Jesse)*
6. Micah 5:2: What did God say would come out of Bethlehem? *(The one "that is to be ruler in Israel")*
7. Matthew 1:20: What did the angel call Joseph? *("Thou son of David")*
8. Luke 2:7: Why was the baby laid in a manger? *(There was no room for them in the inn)*

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You that You always keep Your promises, even ones You made hundreds of years ago. Thank You that You rule over everything, even kings and rulers. Help us trust You and obey You when it isn't easy. Thank You for loving us and coming to save us in Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen."

If a child asks about the donkey, the innkeeper or the star: say, "Luke 2 doesn't mention a donkey, an innkeeper, knocking on doors or a stable. It says only that 'there was no room for them in the inn' (Luke 2:7). The star is in Matthew 2, with the wise men. We tell the story the way the Bible tells it."

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