Preschool–Grade 6

The Road to Bethlehem

Sunday School Lesson for Preteens (Ages 11–12), 45–60 minutes

Main point: God rules over history, even rulers who don't know Him, and He keeps every promise on time. So we can trust Him and obey Him, even when life is inconvenient.
Bible passage: Luke 2:1–7 and Micah 5:2. Students read them out loud themselves.
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)* and "But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." *Micah 5:2 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each student, 8 index cards, paper or a notebook and a pen for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, and one take-home sheet for each student.
Before class: read Luke 1:26–38, Luke 2:1–7 and Micah 5:2. Write both memory verses on the board. Write one event from part 1 on each index card (leave off the references), and shuffle the cards.

1. Opening game: Put God's Plan in Order (5–10 minutes)

Students work in two or three groups (make a set of cards for each group, or let the groups take turns). They put the cards in the order they happened. Then read the answer, in order:

1. David is the son of Jesse, a man of Bethlehem (1 Samuel 17:12).
2. Micah writes that the ruler of Israel will come out of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).
3. The angel Gabriel tells Mary her son will have "the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:31–32).
4. An angel tells Joseph, "thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife" (Matthew 1:20).
5. Caesar Augustus sends out a decree that all the world should be taxed (Luke 2:1).
6. Joseph and Mary go up to Bethlehem (Luke 2:4–5).
7. Mary's firstborn son is born and laid in a manger (Luke 2:7).
8. Later, the chief priests tell King Herod that Christ will be born in Bethlehem, because "thus it is written by the prophet" (Matthew 2:4–6).

Ask: *Which card surprised you most?* Point to card 5: nothing in the Bible says Caesar knew God's promise, but God used his decree anyway.

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2. Bible story: Students Read It (15 minutes)

Read out loud: Luke 2:1–7. Students take turns, a verse or two each. Old words in this passage:

- **decree** (2:1): an official order; **taxed**: counted and registered so people could be taxed
- **Cyrenius was governor of Syria** (2:2): the Roman ruler over that area at the time
- **every one into his own city** (2:3): each person to his family's hometown
- **went up** (2:4): Bethlehem sits high in the hills of **Judaea**, the southern part of the land, more than 60 miles south of Nazareth in a straight line
- **house and lineage of David** (2:4): Joseph's family line went back to King David
- **espoused wife** (2:5): promised in marriage; **great with child**: her baby was due soon
- **the days were accomplished that she should be delivered** (2:6): the time came for the baby to be born
- **swaddling clothes** (2:7): strips of cloth wrapped snugly around a baby; **manger**: a box animals eat from

Read out loud: Micah 5:2. Old words: **Ephratah** is an old name for the Bethlehem area; **little among the thousands of Judah** means a small town among the towns of Judah; **whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting** means the promised ruler did not begin in Bethlehem: He has always been. Micah preached in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (Micah 1:1), about 700 years before Jesus was born.

Read out loud: Proverbs 21:1. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." **Whithersoever** means wherever. Ask: *Caesar gave his order for his own reasons. How did God use it?* (It brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, the town God named in Micah 5:2.)

What the text does not 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" (2:7). The star belongs to the wise men in Matthew 2. Good Bible students notice the difference between what the Bible says and what we have heard.

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3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. Caesar Augustus ruled the Roman Empire, and nothing in Luke 2 says he knew about Micah 5:2. What does it mean that "the king's heart is in the hand of the LORD" (Proverbs 21:1)?
2. Joseph obeyed a tax order from a foreign ruler and made a long trip with Mary, whose baby was due soon (Luke 2:4–5). What does that teach us about obeying the rules over us, even when it is inconvenient?
3. God made His promise about Bethlehem about 700 years ahead. Which of God's promises are you still waiting on? How does Micah 5:2 help you wait?
4. Micah called Bethlehem "little among the thousands of Judah." Why do you think God chose a little town? What does that say about the people and places God uses?
5. "There was no room for them in the inn" (2:7). Things didn't look perfect, but God's plan was right on time. Where in your life does it look like things are going wrong? How can you trust God there?
6. Micah says the ruler's "goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." What does that tell us about who was born in Bethlehem?

4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Old words in Luke 2:4: **Galilee** is the northern land where Nazareth was; **Judaea** is the southern land where Bethlehem is; **house and lineage** means family line. Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say Luke 2:4 this week; keep working on Micah 5:2 next week too.

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5. What this means for us (5–10 minutes)

Say: "Micah said the One born in Bethlehem was 'from of old, from everlasting.' Paul wrote, 'God was manifest in the flesh' (1 Timothy 3:16, KJV): the one God came to us as a man to be our Saviour. God loves you, and 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). That is why we need a Saviour. 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). We obey the gospel the way Peter preached it: '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) We **repent**, turning from sin, and our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are buried with Jesus by baptism in His name, all the way under the water. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we rise to walk in newness of life, a brand-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 utterance, which means as He gives the words (Acts 2:4). Jesus called this being born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5)."
Pray with the students, 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.

6. Activity: Journal (10 minutes)

Each student writes privately. No one has to share. Write these three prompts on the board:

1. Where in my life do I need to remember that God is in charge, even over people with power?
2. What is something inconvenient I need to obey this week, the way Joseph made the trip?
3. Write a short prayer thanking God for a promise He has kept, and asking Him to help you trust Him with one you are still waiting on.
   If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one sentence.

This week: each time you hear about a ruler or leader in the news, remember Proverbs 21:1: God is still in charge. Thank Him for keeping His promises.

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You that You rule over history and You keep every promise on time. Help us trust You when things look small or go wrong, and help us obey even when it's inconvenient. Thank You for loving us and coming to save us through Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen."

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