

THE PRESENCE OF LOVE

(15–20 minutes, easy set-up)

Use this outline and any of the corresponding activities to share the Biblical Truth with students.

Introduction: Love is such an interesting thing. We see stories of love in movies and on YouTube® where people do crazy things in order to proclaim their love for someone else. The thing about all of these signs of love is that they are over the top, grand gestures. They make a big scene to proclaim their love. This is not how God proclaimed His love. While He did create a big scene with the angels, Jesus' birth and God's love was primarily described in the most humble of circumstances.

1. God showed love through humble circumstances (Luke 2:1-7).

Biblical Background: Just as any modern country must know who is in their country, the Romans decided it was time for them to hold a census (vv.1-3). This is significant for two reasons. First, it forced Joseph and his family to go to Bethlehem since he was from the house of David (v. 4). This fulfilled the prophecy that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). Second, it helps us date the event. (See the commentary for notes concerning the date of Jesus' birth.) This was not an easy trip for the family since Joseph's wife was nine months pregnant (vv. 5-6). Almost immediately after arriving, Mary gave birth in the lowly environment of a stable since the town had too many visitors and no suitable, indoor lodging was available (v. 7). Even though this was a remarkable event in history, God chose to have Jesus be born in the most humble of circumstances.

Illustration: How many of you know where you were born? You were probably born in a hospital with the best doctors and nurses available. You and your mom had all the medical care you needed. The environment was so clean that the doctors wore scrubs and booties over their shoes. Now, look at this stable. (Display a picture of a manger scene from your church or from the Internet.) Would you like to be born here? Would you like to share a bed with the sheep's food? Of all the places in the world, this is the last place that anyone should be born. And yet, this was exactly where Jesus was born.

Application: Even though God had the power and ability to have Jesus born with the best midwife (the baby-delivering doctor of the day) in the best environment, He didn't. He chose to have Jesus born in a lowly stable because God was showing His love for all the people for the rest of time. With Jesus' birth in a stable, no one could boast that Jesus was too good for the poor. In fact, in the circumstances of His birth, Jesus was just like the poor. This was a great picture of the love God shows everyone.

2. God showed love by telling the humble shepherds (Luke 2:8-14).

Biblical Background: As Jesus was born, some nearby shepherds were just watching their sheep and doing their job (v. 8). Suddenly, a great scene unfolded. An angel appeared to these lowly outcasts. The shepherds were terrified by the astonishing scene (v. 9). These were the same shepherds who would fight off wild animals to protect their flock, but they were scared of the events surrounding them. The angel immediately calmed the shepherds and proclaimed the good news about Jesus' birth (vv. 10-11). The angel told the shepherds exactly how to identify the baby—He was wrapped in cloths and lying in a

manger, an uncommon occurrence (v. 12). Then the scene turned even more dramatic. A host of angels showed up, praising God for what He was doing (vv. 13-14). The shepherds couldn't miss that this was an important event, and they were allowed to experience it. There were millions of people in the world, but God chose to share this message with shepherds.

Illustration: When Christmas is over and you've unwrapped all of your presents, who is the first person you call to tell of all that you received? I'm betting you don't run down to the gas station and tell the employee behind the counter. I bet you don't run to a local nursing home and tell everyone there. No, you call your best friend. When you have big news, you tell the people who are closest to you.

Application: The shepherds, in their humble state, were the group of people with whom God chose to share His message of love. God showed that He cared for the humble by proclaiming this great message of hope and love to them.

3. God showed love by having the shepherds give a humble proclamation (Luke 2:15-20).

Biblical Background: As soon as the angels left, the shepherds wanted to see this newborn baby—this great gift that God had given the world (v. 15). They *hurried* to see Jesus (v. 16). There was no time to waste; this was a big deal. When they got there, they told Mary and Joseph about the angels and their message (v. 17). Everyone who heard the story was awestruck by this humble proclamation from this humble group of shepherds (v. 18). But Mary pondered all that was said (v. 19). She knew she was a virgin who had given birth, fulfilling the promise that another angel had revealed to her (see Matt. 1:20-23). She knew there was a lot more to the story, but the proclamation by the shepherds was simple and to the point: Jesus was the Messiah. Then the shepherds went on their way praising God for all that He had shown them (v. 20).

Interactive Questions: When someone tells you big news, do you think about who told you the news? Do you sit and think about how that news will impact your life? How would you have reacted if you were the shepherds in this story? How would you have reacted if you were Mary or Joseph? How would you have reacted if you were one of the other people at the manger when the shepherds told the story?

Application: The message and the messenger are always important when news is being delivered. God chose humble shepherds to give a humble proclamation of the good news—the Messiah had been born. God's message, and the messengers that He sent, reveal that God was giving His love through the most humble of circumstances.

Conclusion: We all desperately want and need God's love in our lives. **God's Love For Us** was fully expressed through the birth of His Son, Jesus. God chose to reveal this love through the most humble of circumstances: Jesus was born in a manger, angels revealed the good news to shepherds, and shepherds went and told others about Jesus' birth. God's love is unique in that it has no boundaries.