



EXPLORE THE BIBLE.

Session 4: The First Christmas
Suggested Week of Use: December 24, 2023
Core Passage: Luke 2:1-15

News Story Summary

Due to the war in the Middle East, churches in Jerusalem and its surrounding region will experience a very different Christmas celebration this year. Religious leaders recently called on congregations to forgo their customary Christmas celebrations and to emphasize more somber and spiritual observances. One leader noted that an “atmosphere of sadness prevails for the civilian losses. It is time for compassion and solidarity, not for joyful and worldly celebrations.”

This is a significant declaration since thousands of pilgrims make their way to Bethlehem every year as a symbol of peace and as a demonstration of reconciliation between Christians, Muslims, and Jews in the region. This decision will also have a profound impact on the economy of Bethlehem, which depends on tourism to fund about 90 percent of its budget. The absence of traditional Christmas activities in Bethlehem is a stark reminder of the need for lasting peace—not only in the Middle East, but also around the world. This is especially poignant at this time of the year as we celebrate the coming of the Prince of Peace.

For more about this story, search “Bethlehem Cancels Christmas Celebrations”

Engage

To supplement the Engage activities, lead adults to discuss their favorite Christmas traditions, including spiritual celebrations they look forward to each year. Ask: *How would your Christmas be different if you weren't able to engage in these spiritual activities?* Share the news story about how religious leaders have cancelled the majority of Christmas spiritual celebrations and observances in Bethlehem this year. Discuss what local residents may have thought about this decision. Share that while humans might cancel observances related to Christmas, God's authority is still seen in His offer of eternal life made possible by the birth—and ultimate death—of Jesus. Point out that today's session reminds us that, regardless of what form our activities might take, Jesus should be the center of all we do at Christmas.

Challenge

To supplement the Challenge activities, lead adults to recite Luke 1:31-32 aloud. Share this quote from the news story: “a time for joyful and worldly celebrations.” Discuss reactions to that statement. Affirm that the loss of life is always a terrible thing, but that the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, can still fill all believers with joy. Even in difficult, trying, and war-torn times, God is still in control, and He still offers hope through the Child born in Bethlehem.