The Miracle of the Virgin Birth
Christmas Lesson

Focal Text: Matthew 1:18-2:12
Background Passage: Matthew 1:18-2:25

Teaching Aim: To help members be better prepared to truly celebrate the Christmas season by remembering the source of joy and the cause of celebration.

Connect with Life: Begin by reading the following: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it. For there those who carried us away captive required of us a song, and those who plundered us required of us mirth, saying, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’ How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her skill! If I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy.” (Psalm 137:1-6)

The children of Israel were in captivity and yet they were being required to sing and act joyful. How could they? They were not in their beloved Jerusalem!

As we approach the Christmas season everyone is expected to sing the songs of the season and be filled with joy. But sometimes our hearts are so heavy with concern that we find it impossible to sing. What rivers of Babylon will make it difficult for some to sing this year? What are concerns that have to be dealt with this year before we can truly sing the song of Zion?

Allow members to share some of these concerns such as the following:
1. Family members who are no longer with us.
2. Family members who will not be home for Christmas.
3. Illness in the family.
4. Relationship problems.
5. Financial concerns.

What will it take this Christmas for us to be able to sing the song of Zion?

Guide Bible Study: Read Matthew 1:17 and remind members that it took fourteen generations from the time of their exile in Babylon before the children of Israel could sing their song. Discuss why the genealogy was so important to the Jews? Why would it be important for us today? Share how the Baby Boomers are interested in this in record numbers. “This verse indicates that God has worked in history to meet people’s need for a Savior. Christians can announce confidently that Jesus is the promised Messiah.”

Read Matthew 1:18-21 and ask members to listen for evidence of the truth of the previous statements. Share the marriage customs of that day. What became the river of Babylon for Joseph? What enabled him to turn this experience into a song?
We then read of three fulfilled prophecies that continue to reinforce the work of God in history. Read each one and ask members to determine some Christmas carols that could be related to each prophecy. For example:

1. Matthew 1:22-25 (The prophecy about His name)
   a. Joy to the World
   b. The First Noel
   c. Come All Ye Faithful
   d. Silent Night

2. Matthew 2:13-15 (The prophecy about His coming out of Egypt)
   a. We Three Kings
   b. It Came Upon the Midnight Clear
   c. Hark the Herald Angels Sing

3. Matthew 2:19-25 (The prophecy about His being called a Nazarene)
   a. Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne
   b. Little Town of Bethlehem

Then remind members that this Christmas season is not a time of joy for everyone. There are some people who celebrate the season without accepting the savior. There are definitely two different responses to the birth of Christ just as there were in Jesus’ day.

Enlist someone to read Matthew 2:1-12 and ask members to listen for the two different responses to the news of Jesus’ birth. Then lead them to determine some of the reasons for these different responses. As each verse is discussed share background information from the study guides and enlist someone to write suggested reasons for these two responses on the board. For example:

**The Wise Men**

1. The Magi were philosophers, astrologers, practitioners of medicine, and magicians. They were obviously open-minded (and eyed) regarding what they had heard and seen.
2. They were gentiles from Persia who practiced fortune telling and dream interpretation. They were not reluctant to follow the directions they were receiving from God.
3. They were filled with great joy at the sight of the new-born baby. They perceived correctly that they had received divine guidance in this quest.
4. They believed that Christ was The King and they worshipped Him.
5. They also responded in faith by giving Christ the first gifts of Christmas.
6. They continued to be used by God and were obedient to God’s words for their lives.

**King Herod and Jerusalem**

1. Herod was half-Jew and half-Idumean. His life was centered round himself.
2. Herod used whatever means necessary to insure a place of power and authority in his world. He had no regard for anyone but himself.
3. Herod was “terrified or tremendously agitated” by the news of Jesus’ birth. He could not have anyone threatening his position of power and authority.
4. The other Jewish people were equally terrified by the news of Jesus’ birth because it did not fit their expectations and did not seem to include them in its announcement.

5. The terms “chief priests” and “teachers” probably relate to an ad hoc meeting and not an official meeting of the Sanhedrin since Herod was not on good terms with the Jewish court. This began a determined rejection process by the Jewish leaders that eventually hung Jesus on the cross.

6. Herod revealed the wickedness of his heart and his total rejection of anything related to God’s love for the world as revealed through the birth and life of Christ.

Then lead members in a time of discussion related to the following questions:

1. In what way did Jesus compare the early life of Jesus to that of Moses in chapter two? (Both spent their early years in Egypt.)

2. What important role did Nazareth play in the life of Jesus? (He spent more than 90% of his time on the earth in that city.)

3. In what way do these events reveal God’s inclusion of everyone in the world in His plan for redemption?

4. How do we know that some time had passed following the birth of Jesus before the visitation of the wise men? (Jesus was no longer a baby, but a child and they had moved from the stable to a house.)

5. What do we know about Bethlehem? (A Judean village located about six miles south of Jerusalem. Situated on a limestone hill 2,500 feet high, the area possessed a summit at either end with a hollow, saddle-like area between. In older times, Bethlehem had been known as Ephrath or Ephrathah. The name Bethlehem meant house of bread; a name made fitting by the fertile land in the area.)

6. How do we know the Magi were Gentiles? (They had to ask for information regarding the location of Jesus’ birth. It is interesting that Herod did not know this information either.)

7. What was the significance of the gifts offered by the Magi? (There were the gifts reserved for royalty.)

**Encourage Application:** Lead members to identify the point of application for each of these prophecies in their own lives where a song is needed. For example:

1. Some may need to experience the presence of Jesus in a fresh and vibrant way because of some area of concern in their lives. What would it take for them to be able to sing these songs of Christmas? (To be reminded of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives that was made possible by the birth, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus.)
2. Some may need to be reminded of those who need deliverance from sin. What would it take for them to be able to sing these songs of Christmas? (To be reminded of God’s plan for deliverance from the time of the Egyptian bondage of the Jews.)

3. Some may be dealing with some area of humility in their lives. What would it take for them to be able to sing these songs of Christmas? (To be reminded of the humility of our Savior.)

Discuss with members how Joseph’s experience can be related to our rivers of Babylon problems today. If any of us will listen to the Holy Spirit, we will be reminded of the message of Christmas. This message, as given to Joseph, is given to each of us today who believe. Allow discussion related to specific examples of problems that are answered in light of this message. For example:

1. Death of loved ones. We must focus on the joys of heaven. We can share our feelings of loneliness with someone with an accompanying word of certainty about heaven. Our sadness can be turned into a song.
2. Absent loved ones. We could invite someone to our home for Christmas who might otherwise have no one to spend the day with.
3. Illness. We should minister to them with our visits and prayers during the holiday season. They need to see us praying in faith for their healing. They need to hear us sing a song of hope.
4. Relationship problems. Look at how the relationship problem between Mary and Joseph was worked out by the Holy Spirit. Prayer and proper focus will help solve all relationship problems and put a song in our hearts.
5. Financial concerns. This was what brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem and to a stable. Getting things in proper perspective will help restore the song. The true gifts of Christmas don’t cost anything except caring enough to share. This is what the songs are all about. Sing them!

Close with the following: “Last night I lay a-sleeping, there came a dream so fair, I stood in old Jerusalem, beside the temple there. I heard the children singing, and ever as they sang, I thought the voice of angels from heav’n in answer rang. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, lift up your gates and sing. Hosanna in the highest, Hosanna to your King! And then I thought my dream was changed, the streets no longer rang, hushed were the glad Hosannas the little children sang. The sun grew dark with mystery, the morn was cold and chill. As the shadow of a cross arose upon a lonely hill. And once again the scene was changed, new earth there seemed to be. I saw the holy city beside the tide-less sea. The light of God was on its streets, the gates were open wide, and all who would might enter, and no one was denied. No need of moon or stars by night, or sun to shine by day, it was the new Jerusalem that would not pass away. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, sing for the night is o’er. Hosanna in the highest, Hosanna forevermore.”