



# COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

Messy Christmas / Week 1

[PRELUDE](#) [SOCIAL](#) [WORSHIP](#) [STORY](#) [GROUPS](#) [HOME](#)

## SERIES BOTTOM LINE

**Joy to the world anyway.**

## GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To encourage students to find joy in God's presence with them this Christmas no matter what their holiday season looks like.

## WEEK 1 BOTTOM LINE

**You're not alone when life gets messy.**

## SCRIPTURE

- *Luke 2:6-14, 16-20 NIV*

## TEACHING SLIDES

All scripture, bottom lines, and teaching points that are bolded in this script are also provided as slides in your weekly "Teaching" folder.

## OPTIONAL MEDIA

\*[OPTIONAL MEDIA](#) for this week available for purchase through the [XP3 HS Media Package](#):

- Messy Christmas Countdown (10 minutes)
- Family Photo Christmas Fails (for the interactive)
- Definitions of Choose (for the interactive)
- Messy Christmas Teaching Video

# TEACHING OUTLINE

## INTRODUCTION

- It feels like the Christmas season is always telling us how we *should* feel about it.
- Let me ask you a question (shout out your answer): What words come to mind when you hear me say “Christmas”?
- *INTERACTIVE: See Communicator Guide for detailed instructions.*
- Christmas is supposed to be the classic, joyful, wonderful time of year, but sometimes it just seems to miss.

## TENSION

- Still, every year it keeps such a special vibe.
- The truth is, sometimes that high bar of expectation is not the actual reality you're dealing with.
- So, is it even possible to experience joy, hope, and peace when Christmas seems so *messy*?

## TRUTH

- Today, we're going to walk through the story that started Christmas.
- Throughout history, Mary has often been portrayed as someone who has this glamorous Instagram-worthy story.
- But Mary, like us, was a real person going through a situation that had some major expectations associated with it.
- The expectations were so intense that an actual angel was the one who told Mary all about what would happen. Here's what the angel told Mary:
  - *But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David (Luke 1:30-31 NIV),*
- The angel painted this really cool picture of how Mary's baby would be the Son of God and be great and sit on a throne.
- But despite those encouraging words, the behind the scenes of Mary's situation were a bit messy.
  - **Mary was young.**
  - **Mary was in danger.**
  - **Mary was at the center of all the town gossip.**
  - **Mary's conditions weren't ideal.**
- It's described like this:
  - *While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them (Luke 2:6-7 NIV).*
- The list of stressful circumstances Mary was dealing with could go on and on, but the point is, the peaceful manger scene we see reflected in nativity sets everywhere? They are only part of the picture.
- So, if your Christmas doesn't feel like it's living up to “commercialized Christmas,” then Mary's story can be very relatable.
- But does that mean that all is lost?
- Well, no. It's the opposite, really.

- We've already set the scene for Mary's "behind the manger scene" situation. But, in the middle of her messy, scary, uncertain situation, something else was happening not far away with some shepherds in an open field.
  - *And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*  
*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,*  
*"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests (Luke 2:8-14 NIV)."*
- While Mary was experiencing the joy, and let's be honest, probably the absolute terror, of giving birth to a baby boy, these shepherds were finding out in a very big way that the long-awaited, Messiah was finally here!
- You can imagine what the shepherds did next. It's the same thing you or I would do if we got news like that. They went to see for themselves!
  - *So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them (Luke 2:16-18 NIV).*
- It's almost like their appearance was confirmation that despite a situation not living up to expectations, God was still there, present in the details.
- So, you have to wonder, what was Mary's response to all of this? The angel, the unmet expectations, the difficult circumstances, the shepherds showing up and confirming what the angel said?
  - *But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19 NIV).*
- Mary treasured, and she pondered.
- After the shepherds left to go spread the word about the new Messiah, they came back to the place where Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were:
  - *The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told (Luke 2:20 NIV).*
- We can take our cue from Mary (and the shepherds too).
- While Mary found joy, the treasure in her situation, the shepherds celebrated with her and praised God for the Savior who had just been born.
- We can do the same thing.
- You can celebrate even when things don't seem all that great!
- Why? Because God is with you.
- **BOTTOM LINE: YOU'RE NOT ALONE WHEN LIFE GETS MESSY.**

## APPLICATION

- God is with us too. And if we learn from Mary's experience, we can know that regardless of what happens in our lives, we can choose joy and celebrate that God is with us.
- *INTERACTIVE: See the Communicator Guide for detailed instructions.*
- *I'm going to give you a few definitions of the word **choose**, according to various dictionaries. I want you to think about how you can do these things this Christmas season.*
  - **Pick out.**
  - **Decide on a course of action.**
  - **Select freely.**
- So, think about this, what's one way you find and choose joy this Christmas season?

## LANDING

- While Mary was giving birth in that cave, she still operated on the promise that God was with her.
- Imagine if you could see God working even when life gets tough.
- This would make way for you to choose joy, even when Christmas feels messy.
- When you head to small groups, think about your answer to this question:
  - **What does this Christmas season feel like for you?**



# TEACHING SCRIPT

Messy Christmas / Week 1

PRELUDE SOCIAL WORSHIP STORY GROUPS HOME

## WEEK 1 BOTTOM LINE

**Joy to the world anyway.**

## INTRODUCTION

3 MINUTES

It feels like the Christmas season is always telling us how we *should* feel about it.

Let me ask you a question (shout out your answer): What words come to mind when you hear me say “Christmas”?

Ok, point proven . . . This time of year, there are signs or songs all around us saying, "Peace," "hope," "love," "family," "joy." But, just because it's Christmas doesn't mean that life is suddenly perfect.



## INTERACTIVE

OPTIONAL MEDIA available for purchase through the XP3HS Media Package:

Messy Christmas – “Family Photo Christmas Fails”

*INTERACTIVE: (Show images of Christmas mishaps or failed Christmas family photos.) Here's what I mean . . . kind of. Sometimes, it's hard to get Christmas just right. Sometimes, this season turns out to be kind of a mess. Like this . . . Or this . . . Or how about this . . . ?*

Christmas is supposed to be the classic, joyful, wonderful time of year, but sometimes it just seems to miss.

## TENSION

### 3 MINUTES

Still, every year it keeps such a special vibe. There's just something about it. We all know that Christmas movies are meant to feel sappy and remind you of all of the best-case scenarios in life. The songs of this season add to it by setting a high bar for all the feelings we're supposed to feel just because it's Christmas. The food is literally mostly sugar. What could be better? BUT . . .

The truth is, sometimes that high bar of expectation is not the actual reality you're dealing with. Sometimes . . .

- You're dealing with getting used to having two Christmases or getting used to a new stepsibling.
- You're facing the fact that money is tight and presents may not happen.
- You're reminded of someone who isn't there to celebrate with you this year.
- You're facing two weeks without a single friend checking in on you or wanting to hang out.
- You're seeing picture-perfect families everywhere, but you're aware that yours doesn't seem that way.

So, is it even possible to experience joy, hope, and peace when Christmas seems so *messy*?

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## TRUTH

### 8 MINUTES

Today, we're going to walk through the story that started Christmas. Back then, there wasn't all the hustle and bustle that we see today. In fact, the nativity scenes we see depicted all around us don't give us an accurate view of what was really going on with the people involved.

Throughout history, Mary has often been portrayed as someone who has this glamorous Instagram-worthy story. The paintings we see of her show her with perfect lighting, a warm glow around her, and a perfect little smile.

But Mary, like us, was a real person going through a situation that had some major expectations associated with it.

The expectations were so intense that an actual angel was the one who told Mary all about what would happen. Here's what the angel told Mary:

*But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David (Luke 1:30-31 NIV),*

The angel painted this really cool picture of how Mary's baby would be the Son of God and be great and sit on a throne. The angel also told Mary that she had found favor with God! In light of shocking circumstances, that had to be encouraging as well.

But despite those encouraging words, the behind the scenes of Mary's situation were a bit messy.

- **Mary was young.** She wasn't a 30-something-year-old woman with an audiobook about how to have and raise a baby to listen to on her commute to and from work. She was not prepping a nursery with all the proper tools and painting clouds and Noah's ark animals on walls. She was young, scared, and had never given birth to a baby before!
- **Mary was in danger.** In Mary's culture, couples that weren't married didn't have sex. Or really, weren't even allowed to by their religious law. So, to break those rules actually meant to potentially be severely punished. Even though Mary hadn't broken the rules of her culture, being pregnant by a miracle of God probably would have been tough to explain. The angel didn't show up and explain it to the lawmakers, so you can imagine how hard it was for lawmakers to let it slide.
- **Mary was at the center of all the town gossip.** It's a nightmare for everyone, knowing that the whispers and darting looks are all about you. The judgment, the lack of empathy and understanding—Mary was carrying all of that.
- **Mary's conditions weren't ideal.** Nowadays we have doctors and nurses meant to make sure mom and baby are safe and healthy! Mary had none of that. Childbirth is excruciating and dangerous stuff, and instead of medical professionals, she was with her fiancé in a cave. Instead of wrapping Jesus in warm blankets and putting him in a nice warm bed at their home, she had to wrap him up and put him in a feeding trough for animals. Have you ever seen livestock eat? Not glamorous!

It's described like this:

*While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them (Luke 2:6-7 NIV).*

The list of stressful circumstances Mary was dealing with could go on and on, but the point is, the peaceful manger scene we see reflected in nativity sets everywhere? They are only part of the picture. Just like for every filtered, red carpet, celebrity social media post, there is the behind the scenes battle of what it took to actually get there. And that's what Mary was dealing with. Her actual reality was MESSY behind the scenes.

So, if your Christmas doesn't feel like it's living up to “commercialized Christmas,” then Mary's story can be very relatable.

But does that mean that all is lost? That Christmas is doomed? And there's no point in even trying to make things better?

Well, no. It's the opposite, really.

We've already set the scene for Mary's “behind the manger scene” situation. But, in the middle of her messy, scary, uncertain situation, something else was happening not far away with some shepherds in an open field.

*And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”*

*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,  
“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests (Luke 2:8-14 NIV).”*

While Mary was experiencing the joy, and let's be honest, probably the absolute terror, of giving birth to a baby boy, these shepherds were finding out in a very big way that the long-awaited, Messiah was finally here! Now this was something that the Hebrew people had been talking about, praying for, and waiting for over hundreds of years. It's no wonder God used angels and a "Heavenly host" to send that message!

You can imagine what the shepherds did next. It's the same thing you or I would do if we got news like that. They went to see for themselves!

*So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them (Luke 2:16-18 NIV).*

So now, picture Mary in her current circumstances. The angel told her some good news and that a great thing would happen, but now she's holding her new baby in a cave, and suddenly, these strangers—shepherds she's never met—arrive. And to top it all off, they know that her newborn is the Messiah too!

It's almost like their appearance was confirmation that despite a situation not living up to expectations, God was still there, present in the details. It proved that God was present with them, period.

So, you have to wonder, what was Mary's response to all of this? The angel, the unmet expectations, the difficult circumstances, the shepherds showing up and confirming what the angel said?

*But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19 NIV).*

Mary treasured, and she pondered.

In all of the ups and downs of her circumstances, Mary knew that God was with her. And because of that, she was able to find the treasure—the joy—in her situation, and she held that thought in her heart on that very first Christmas.

After the shepherds left to go spread the word about the new Messiah, they came back to the place where Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were:

*The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told (Luke 2:20 NIV).*

We can take our cue from Mary (and the shepherds too).

While Mary found joy, the treasure in her situation, the shepherds celebrated with her and praised God for the Savior who had just been born.

We can do the same thing. Whether circumstances are fantastic or circumstances have brought you to a cave and things seem a bit uncertain, we can choose to find joy in our own situations.

You can celebrate even when things don't seem all that great!

When things are boring, you can celebrate by enjoying a restful moment.

When things are less than glamorous, you can find beauty in simplicity.

When things don't meet your expectations, you can bring hope to others by serving.

You can still find something to be joyful about this Christmas.

Why? Because God is with you.

This means that even though things might be messy now, the One who is hope, peace, joy, and love cares about what you're walking through. You aren't alone. And even better than that, the God who created everything is involved in your life every day.

**YOU'RE NOT ALONE WHEN LIFE GETS MESSY.**

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## APPLICATION

3 MINUTES

Mary believed the promise that God was with her. The shepherds believed that God was with her too. In fact, Mary's whole life was lived on the foundation of the promise that God was with her. That's why she's someone we still talk about today!

God is with us too. And if we learn from Mary's experience, we can know that regardless of what happens in our lives, we can choose joy and celebrate that God is with us.



## INTERACTIVE

OPTIONAL MEDIA available for purchase through the XP3HS Media Package:  
Messy Christmas – “Definitions of Choose”

*Communicator, hold up a sign that says “Choose.” Put the following definitions on the screen.))*

*I'm going to give you a few definitions of the word **choose**, according to various dictionaries. I want you to think about how you can do these things this Christmas season.*

- **Pick out.** *How can you pick out some things that will be joyful for you this Christmas? For example, spending time with family you miss, sleeping in, or having no school work or projects. Pick out some things to enjoy.*
- **Decide on a course of action.** *What are some action steps you can take to choose joy? Can you plan something fun with your friends? Can you help your mom or stepdad with something? Start a new tradition by finding a way to serve people.*
- **Select freely.** *I promise you something: If you freely selected some things to be joyful about this Christmas season, they would have a way better chance of bringing you joy.*

*Maybe there's something you've never enjoyed before, but this year you're going to make up your mind to have fun with it. When you select it freely, it's a game-changer!*

*I could give more definitions, but you get the idea.*

Keep in mind, this season can feel messy for lots of people besides you. There are others in your life who might be dealing with the let-down of unmet expectations or with difficult circumstances. So make it a point to show your family, friends, and people you interact with a little bit of patience and grace.

So, think about this, what's one way you find and choose joy this Christmas season?

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## LANDING

2 MINUTES

While Mary was giving birth in that cave, she still operated on the promise that God was with her. If you were absolutely, without a doubt, certain that God is with you, how would knowing that affect how you live this Christmas season?

Imagine if there was a way to have hope, in every circumstance. Imagine if you could be confident that you're never alone in your experiences. Imagine if Christmas could serve as a reminder that God is always with you. Imagine if you could see God working even when life gets tough.

This would make way for you to choose joy, even when Christmas feels messy.

Remember, you can find and choose joy in any circumstance because God is with you.

When you head to small groups, think about your answer to this question:

**What does this Christmas season feel like for you?**



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS

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