

SESSION 2

THE SAVIOR AND OUR NEED FOR SAVING

Session Objectives

This session will equip participants to:

- Reflect on the significance of what Jesus's name means in the context of New Testament stories about his birth.
- Articulate their understandings of sin and consider how the story of Adam, Eve, and the serpent in Genesis 3 shapes those understandings.
- Explore two major ways in which Scripture explains how Jesus saves us from sin.
- Contemplate how Jesus *has saved, is saving, and will yet save* them.

Biblical Foundations

- Matthew 1:18-21
- Luke 2:8-14
- Genesis 3:1-13
- Romans 7:18-25

Leader Preparation

- Carefully read *Incarnation*, chapter 2, as well as this session's Biblical Foundations, noting any topics you want or need to investigate further before the session. Consult trusted Bible dictionaries, concordances, and other resources as desired.
- Preview session 2 video segment; make sure your video sharing setup is working.
- Prepare these links to share in chat:

[Matthew 1:18-21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1%3A18-21&version=CEB)

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1%3A18-21&version=CEB>

[Luke 2:8-14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A8-14&version=CEB)

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A8-14&version=CEB>

[Genesis 3:1-13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%203%3A1-13&version=CEB)

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%203%3A1-13&version=CEB>

Alternatively, put these Scriptures on slides to share with participants.

- Prepare a slide with these three phrases on it:
 - ◇ Jesus has saved me from...
 - ◇ Jesus is saving me from...
 - ◇ Jesus will save me from...
- Prepare a slide of the prayer at the end of *Incarnation*, chapter 2, or a selected stanza from one of the Christmas hymns by Christina Rossetti that Hamilton discusses:

“Love Came Down at Christmas”
https://hymnary.org/text/love_came_down_at_christmas
or “In the Bleak Midwinter”
https://hymnary.org/text/in_the_bleak_midwinter

Starting Your Session

Welcome each participant by name as each enters the virtual meeting. Ask those who took part in the previous session to talk briefly about what they found most interesting, encouraging, or challenging from it, and how it affected their relationship with Jesus and others.

Ask:

- What is your name’s meaning and origin?
- Why and how you were given your name?
- Have you ever wanted to change your name? If so, to what, and why?

Ask if any participants know what Jesus’s name means (some likely will). Read aloud from *Incarnation*:

“Jesus is an anglicized version of the Greek version of his name. But the [original] Hebrew is Yeshua, a shortened version of Yehoshua. It comes from the personal name for God in Hebrew, Yahweh, and the word for ‘to save’ or ‘to deliver,’ yasha. Yeshua therefore means ‘God saves,’ ‘God delivers,’ or ‘God helps.’” (page 48)

Tell participants that session 2 explores the significance of what Jesus’s name means and why it is appropriate for him.

Pray this prayer or one of your own:

Holy and righteous God, before you we can only admit our own unrighteousness and our world’s deep brokenness. In gratitude we praise you for giving your Son. In humility we pray you guide us now, by your Spirit, to live more fully and freely as his forgiven people. Amen.

Video Viewing

Screen-share Adam Hamilton's session 2 video segment. After the video, turn off screen sharing and invite comments and questions. You might prompt discussion by asking:

- Hamilton notes the Advent and Christmas stories in Scripture call Jesus "Savior." In your opinion, how prominently do Christmas celebrations in the church and in our culture focus on Jesus's identity as Savior?
- Hamilton points out some Christians find language of "being saved" uncomfortable. How do you respond to talk of "being saved" and why?
- Hamilton believes affirming Jesus as Savior means, in large part, **affirming God loves and accepts us and other people**. Who do you know, this holiday season, who needs to hear God loves and accepts them? What specific actions could you take to share with them the good news of Jesus as Savior?

Jesus's Name in Stories of His Birth

Put in chat the link you have prepared to Matthew 1:18-21 (or share the slide with the Scripture displayed). Once everyone is looking at the text, recruit a volunteer to read the Scripture aloud. Ask:

- Why does the angel tell Joseph to name Mary's child "Jesus"?
- The angel says Jesus will save "his people." Who were and are Jesus's people?
- Hamilton writes, "There's a little naughtiness in us all," yet Matthew calls Joseph "a righteous man." How does this story illustrate Joseph's righteousness? By what criteria do we recognize righteous people today?
- Do righteous people like Joseph need to be saved from sins? Why or why not?

Put in chat the link you have prepared to Luke 2:8-14 or show the slide with the Scripture displayed. Recruit a volunteer to read aloud Luke 2:8-13; have your entire group read verse 14 (the angels' praise) aloud in unison—don't worry about any lag! Ask:

- For whom is Jesus's birth "good news of great joy," then and now?
- How does the angel's message to the shepherds echo the ancient messianic hopes discussed in session 1? How do these echoes shape our expectation of what it means to call Jesus "Savior"?
- Luke's story of Jesus's birth implicitly contrasts its central characters—the infant Jesus, his parents, and the shepherds—with people who represent military and economic power (see Luke 2:1-2). Why might people without privilege and status especially welcome a Savior's birth as good news?

Missing the Mark

Read aloud from *Incarnation*:

“In both the Old and the New Testaments, the words most commonly translated as sin... mean to stray from the path or to miss the mark... we’re meant to follow as human beings.” (page 52)

Invite responses to this definition and image.

Ask participants how they would answer the woman who asked Adam Hamilton, “Why do Christians spend so much time talking about sin?” After discussion, read aloud from *Incarnation*:

“The good news of Jesus is not that we’re sinners, but that he is our Savior. But we can’t appreciate his role as Savior if we don’t know we need to be saved!” (page 52)

Put in chat the link you have prepared to Genesis 3:1-13 or share the slide with the Scripture displayed. Recruit volunteers to read the Scripture aloud, taking the “roles” of the narrator, the serpent, the woman, the man, and God. Ask:

- How is this a story about “straying from the path” or “missing the mark”?
- “The story is not intended to teach us ancient history,” writes Hamilton, but “to teach us about ourselves” (page 55). Do you agree? Why or why not?
- “[W]hen the Bible speaks of sin,” Hamilton writes, “it means both the innate *tendency to stray* from the right path and also the *act of straying*” (page 54). In which of these ways do you most often think about sin? What are the risks of thinking about sin in only one way or the other?
- Discuss these questions from *Incarnation*:

“What is the forbidden fruit the serpent beckons you to eat? The lie he tells you to lead you astray or to trip you up? Where do you stray from the path or miss the mark?” (page 55)

Closing Your Session

In chapter 2, Hamilton mentions three “senses and tenses” in which the New Testament proclaims Jesus saves us: Jesus *has saved* us (past tense), Jesus *is saving* us (present tense), and Jesus *will save* us (future tense).

Screen-share the slide you prepared with these phrases on it:

- Jesus has saved me from...

- Jesus is saving me from...
- Jesus will save me from...

Ask volunteers to talk briefly about their responses to each prompt (be prepared to do so yourself).

Screen-share the prayer slide you prepared so participants can together either pray the prayer at the end of *Incarnation*, chapter 2, or read together a stanza from one of Christina Rossetti's hymns. You could also screen-share a video recording of one of these hymns.

Optional Extension

Before your session, find two different musical settings of the angelic praise in Luke 2:14. During your session, share your computer's audio and listen to these settings as a group. Ask participants to compare and contrast the settings. How does each one affect participants' "great joy" about the birth of a Savior?

Breakout Room Option

Tell participants that although Christians believe Jesus saves us from sin, they understand exactly *how* Jesus saves us in different ways.

Read aloud from *Incarnation* Adam Hamilton's descriptions of two different understandings of how Jesus saves us from sin:

"Some see his redemptive work mechanistically, transactionally, or juridically: Jesus...died in our place for our sins....[H]is death was a full and sufficient payment...."

"Others see Jesus's death on the cross...less in transactional terms and more in terms of God's attempt to speak to us about sin, mercy, and love." (page 63)

Send participants into at least three and as many as six virtual breakout rooms, depending on total group size. Assign one of these Scriptures to each room:

- Romans 3:23-26
- Romans 5:6-11
- 2 Corinthians 5:14-21
- 1 John 2:1-2
- 1 Peter 2:21-25
- John 15:12-13

Ask each group to read the assigned passage and discuss how it describes the way Jesus saves us. Does each passage support one of the views Hamilton discusses more than the other? both? neither? When participants return to the main room, ask a volunteer from each breakout room to share highlights of her or his group's discussion. Ask the whole group:

- Why does Scripture explain how Jesus saves in a variety of ways and with a variety of images?
- How should this variety shape what we believe and say about how Jesus saves within the church? to those outside the church?
- Hamilton identifies death as “the greatest existential crisis” from which Jesus saves us. How does Jesus's death and resurrection change your perspective on death—your own death someday, or the loss of those for whom you've mourned?