

PAGE TWO - THE TWO LENSES

Note: If you are starting with a new session, remind the group of the agreement to honor one another's opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. Check in with group members to share any information they may have gathered in researching news articles related to the understanding of the life of Jesus and scientific views of life and death.

To begin, review the information on PAGE TWO under the heading: THE SCIENTIFIC LENS, BIRTH, LIFE, AND DEATH. Discuss the general understanding of how cells multiply and develop into complex organisms. Complex organisms have individual parts that work together, such as a human with arms, legs, etc. that work with the body or a plant with roots, leaves, and flowers that carry on functions to support the life of the plant.

Note: This video may cause some students to engage in a conversation about issues related to abortion and the controversy of when life begins. While this is an important and somewhat related topic, this is a moral and ethical discussion that does not serve the purpose of this lesson. Help redirect the conversation to the topic of viewing the two ways of understanding birth, life, death, and resurrection. It would be good to preview the video and prepare your own responses to share with the group.

Give a brief overview of the video noting the following:

A sperm cell combines with an egg to begin conception, DNA forms, Cells begin to multiply, Red blood cells oxygenate the fetus as it grows, The fetus develops

over many weeks into a baby, the baby is suspended in amniotic fluid and receives nourishment through the umbilical cord, the baby can move around, kick, has hiccups, sucks its thumb, the lungs develop last to prepare the child to breath air after birth.

Discuss the video with the group being sensitive to how students might respond to some of the references to sexual reproduction and the brief picture of the birthing process. This video is photographic proof of how a human develops. This technology also allows medical science to study human development, and even perform surgery on a fetus prior to birth. This is an example of using a scientific lens to view human conception, birth, and life.

It is important to help students understand that this video, along with other scientific understandings of conception, birth, and life are not meant as tools to prove or disprove the work of God. This video tells about the life cycle of humans, which is similar to that of other living things.

After the video, read out loud the statement from the webpage:

“For scientists, life and death are viewed within an understanding, or lens, of scientific inquiry to determine how living things work. Think of looking through a telescope lens or other magnifying lens to examine and learn about the world. This way of looking through a lens represents the scientific method to understand all living things.”

Ask: How do you look at things scientifically? *Discuss answers as time allows.*

Next, review the information on PAGE TWO under the heading: THE CHRISTIAN LENS, INCARNATION, LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION.

Have the group recite the second article of the Apostle's Creed together, or use the second faith statement if desired.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord, he has come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to himself. (www.ucc.org)

Ask: What does this statement tell us about Jesus' life cycle? Allow all answers. Encourage the group to notice the phrase from the Apostle's Creed, "conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. This statement reflects the belief in incarnation and the virgin birth of Jesus.

Recall the details of the video and story and ask the group to think about the differences between the scientific view of the life cycle and the story of Jesus' life cycle.

Ask: How do you define incarnation? Allow all answers

How do you define resurrection? *Allow all answers*

Review the definitions as listed on the web page.

Discuss the understanding that Jesus was conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit, and born as a human. Consider whether the same processes of fetal development that were viewed in the National Geographic video would have happened with Jesus. 3D and 4D technology was not available to view the fetus, so we have no photographic proof. The gospels, which serve as a Christian lens, do tell us that Mary was with child and delivered a baby named Jesus. These same gospels also tell us that Jesus was resurrected to a new life and appeared after he died.

It is important to help students understand that the gospels, along with other Christian understandings of conception, birth, life, and resurrection are not meant as tools to prove or disprove the work of science.

Read aloud the following statement from PAGE TWO of the webpage:

“For Christians, life and death are viewed within an understanding, or lens, of how God is in relationship to our world. Think of looking through a telescope lens that represents God’s act of meeting us in the person of Jesus Christ to understand all living things.”

Ask: Does this learning about the two lenses change how you think about conception, incarnation, life, death, and resurrection? Why or why not? How has your thinking about these issues changed since you were younger?

Discuss the reasons for why others might disagree about these two ways of viewing these issues.

To close this portion of the lesson, ask the group if they can tell one way that they might talk to others about the two ways of looking at the beginning and end of life and how they might work together. Encourage members to make a list of “I Believe” statements that include both understandings.

If the session will end, encourage students to ask family and friends about their understanding of scientific and Christian views of life and death, and to bring those ideas back to future sessions.