

THE BIRTH OF JESUS



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CHRIST TO THE WORLD MINISTRIES

The Birth of Jesus

Read Luke 2: 1-20 in your Bible.

The account of the birth of Jesus, known throughout the world as “The Christmas Story” tells how God left the glory of heaven and came to earth as a helpless little baby. We do not know the exact date of Jesus’ birth; the important thing to remember is that he came. Since then, more than two thousand years have passed, and people throughout the world still celebrate his birth.

Joseph and Mary Went to Bethlehem

Caesar Augustus, ruler of the Roman Empire, issued a decree that a census be taken for tax purposes. Every male citizen had to return to his ancestral home to register. Mary and Joseph were both descendants of David. To register, Joseph went to Judea to the little town of Bethlehem, also called the city of David. Even though Mary neared the end of her pregnancy, she accompanied Joseph on the trip. This fulfilled the Old Testament scripture that prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. (Read Micah 5: 2.)

The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem covered about 80 miles. Joseph and Mary traveled down the mountains to the Jordan River, then down the valley, then up the mountains of Judea to Bethlehem. The journey required several days. You can imagine how uncomfortable Mary must have been. She made the long journey on a donkey.

Mary, just a young girl, must have been apprehensive. What was childbirth like? What if she went into labor before they got to their destination? Whom would her child look like? Joseph, too, must have had many concerns.

When Mary and Joseph finally arrived in Bethlehem, they found the town overflowing with people. All the places of lodging had been taken. They found no room. Now what? They accepted the offer of a stable for animals.

The Time Arrived for the Birth of Jesus

“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law” (Galatians 4:4-5). “While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son” (Luke 2:6-7).

The Savior of the world had come! There in the stable, the young, inexperienced Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son . . . God’s Son. Mary wrapped her baby in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger. Jesus was God in the flesh. (Read John 1:14.) Both human and divine, he came to bring joy, hope, and salvation to a sinful world.

Angels Appeared to Shepherds

On that same night on a hillside nearby, some shepherds watched over their sheep. Shepherds received little respect, for they could not do their job and fulfill all the ceremonial laws of cleanliness required by their Jewish religion. God chose these common, lowly shepherds to be the first ones to hear the good news of Jesus’ birth.

These shepherds were tough, hard-working men, accustomed to the nighttime and familiar with the area. It would take much to frighten them. The angel’s sudden appearance terrified them.

The glory of the Lord God shone around the shepherds. The angel spoke calming words to them. He told them not to be afraid, that he brought Good News: the long awaited Savior had been born! This was a time for great joy, not fear. The angel gave the shepherds a sign: they would find the baby in Bethlehem wrapped in cloths, lying in a manger.

Heaven rejoiced at Jesus’ birth! A great multitude of angels suddenly appeared and proclaimed, *“Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace to men on which his favor rests”* (Luke 2:14). (God gives peace to all who put their trust in his son, Jesus.)

God entrusted the message of the birth of Jesus to the shepherds. They did not disappoint him. They acted quickly. The shepherds had only the angel’s word to guide them, but that was enough; they believed, and hastened to Bethlehem. There they found Mary, Joseph, and the baby, just as the angel had said. They must have been amazed at the sight of the Messiah sleeping in a feed trough from which animals ate! The shepherds left the stable praising and glorifying God as they carried the Good News to others.

Mary must have been encouraged by the visit from the shepherds. As she gazed into the face of her son, lying there in the manger, she too, must have worshiped. Jesus was not only her baby; he was also her Savior and Lord . . . God in human flesh, a God big enough to create the universe, yet small enough to nestle in Mary’s arms, a God big enough to forgive the sins of the world, yet small enough to fit inside a manger, a God big enough to give eternal life, yet small enough to live in our hearts. Oh what a Savior! He is worthy of our worship and praise.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ was God’s Christmas gift to all humankind. Because he was human, he understands all our needs; because he is divine, he can meet all our needs. This is Good News indeed!

Pray this prayer: *“Dear God, I know that I’m a sinner. I believe Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead and is alive today. I now turn from my sins. I am placing my faith and trust in Jesus alone to be my Savior and to forgive me. I receive Jesus into my life as Savior and Lord. From this day forward, I will follow Jesus. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for loving me and for coming into my heart and life. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.*

Welcome into God’s family! Share with others that you have received Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Ask for baptism in a local church as a public expression of your faith. If there is no church near you, start a church by gathering a group of persons in your home and worship together on a regular basis. Read your Bible and pray each day. Tell others what

Christ has done for you and what he can do for them.