

The Birth of Jesus

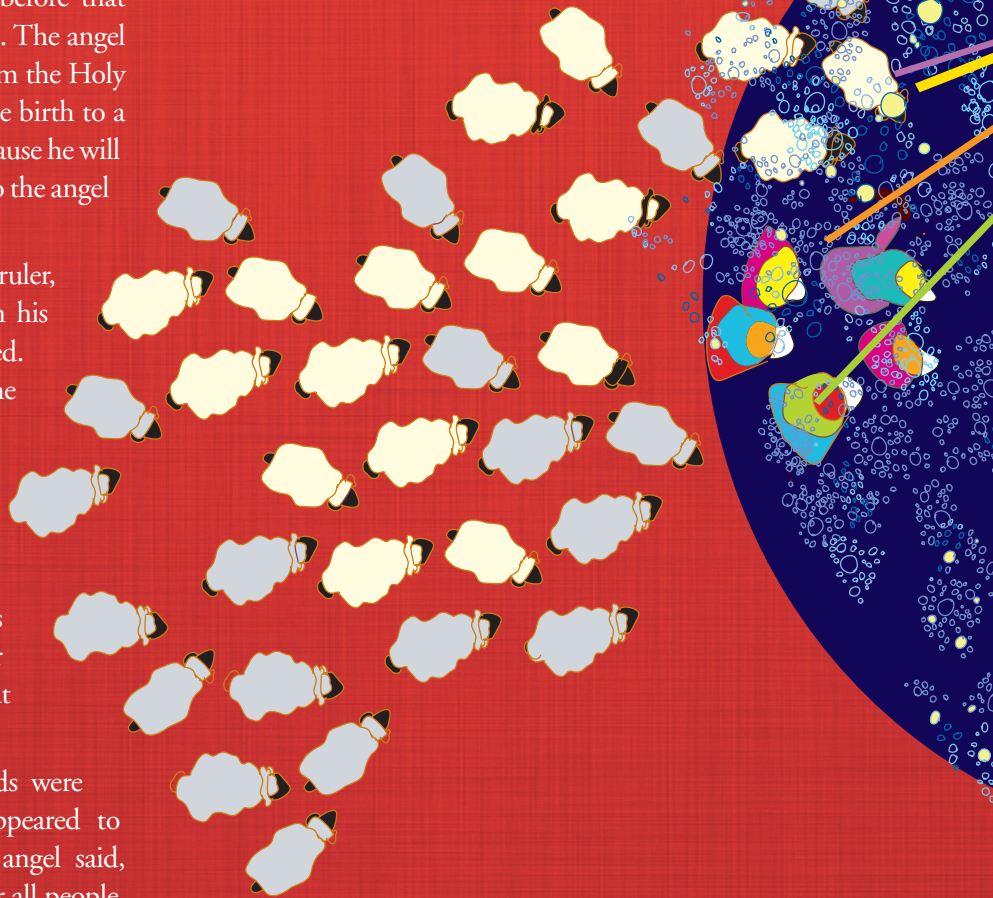
MATTHEW 1:18–2:15; LUKE 2:1–21

When Joseph found out that Mary was having a baby, he was confused and upset. He knew he wasn't the father, so he planned to end their engagement. But before that could happen, an angel came to him in a dream. The angel told him, "The baby growing inside Mary is from the Holy Spirit. Don't be afraid to marry her. She will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name 'Jesus,' because he will save his people from their sins." Joseph listened to the angel and obeyed the Lord.

After they were married, Caesar, the Roman ruler, commanded every man to register his name in his hometown so all the people could be counted. Since Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to travel to Bethlehem. When Mary and Joseph arrived, it was so filled with travelers that there was no place to stay, even though it was time for her baby to be born. So Mary gave birth to Jesus in a stable, where animals were kept. She wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, where animals ate their food. It didn't seem like a special beginning, but it was.

Outside the city that night, some shepherds were watching their sheep. Suddenly, an angel appeared to them. The shepherds were terrified, but the angel said, "Fear not! I bring you good news of great joy for all people.

Today the Savior has been born in the city of David. He is Christ the Lord! This is how you will know him: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:8–12). Then angel after angel filled the sky, praising God. The shepherds could hardly breathe after seeing all the heavenly glory. Most people ignored shepherds, but angels had come to visit them! When the angels left, the shepherds went to see Jesus. They told Mary what the angel had said, and Mary tucked their words away in her heart. Some time later, three wise men came to Jerusalem, asking everyone if they knew where the king of the Jews had been born. King Herod the Great



was the ruler over Jerusalem and he wasn't happy to hear that kind of talk. He asked the scribes and chief priests what the wise men might be talking about. They told him about an Old Testament prophecy that said a ruler would come from Bethlehem. So Herod sent the wise men off to seek the child. He said, "Please be sure to come back and tell me where you find him, so I can worship him too."

But that was a lie. Herod really planned to kill him. He didn't want to share his throne with anyone. After the wise men left, they saw the star they had been following and it led them to Jesus. When they found him, they fell down and worshiped him and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. An angel warned the wise men not to return to Herod, so they went home another way. But when Herod realized he had been tricked, he ordered all the babies in Bethlehem to be killed. It was a terrible, evil plan, but God protected Jesus. An angel earlier warned Joseph about Herod, and Joseph and Mary fled to Egypt, where they were safe.

Did you know God planned the exact moment when Jesus would come into the world to save us from our sins? Paul tells us that "when the fullness of time had come," God sent his Son to redeem us so we could be brought into God's family (Galatians 4:4). God had our salvation all planned out even before he made the world (Ephesians 1:4). So it was easy for God to tell Joseph that Jesus was the one to "save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).



Let's Talk About It!

Who came to visit the newborn baby Jesus?

How many animals are in the picture?

How do the wise men know where to find Jesus?

Week 2

The Birth of Jesus

Story 80 – *The Gospel Story Bible*

Whatever month it is, when you begin this week's Bible study take some time to celebrate Christmas. Pull out the Christmas decorations and place a few ornaments around the room. Get a small gift for each child: a candy bar or snack bar wrapped up in leftover Christmas wrapping paper works well. Give your children the presents on Day One and announce, "Merry Christmas! This week we will be reviewing the Christmas story."

DAY ONE

Picture It

When a leader wants to know how many people are living in his kingdom or nation, he can call for a *census*, which is just a fancy word for counting up the people. In our Bible story today, Caesar Augustus, the ruler of Rome, wanted to count all the people in the whole Roman Empire. To make counting them easier, he told everyone to go back to the town their family came from. That is why Mary and Joseph had to return to Bethlehem, since both their families were from that town.

Imagine if our president commanded that kind of census today. How far would your family have to travel to get back to your dad's hometown? Then imagine you had to walk there! Remember, back in Mary and Joseph's day, there were no cars. The best they had were donkeys and camels or chariots, but most people had to walk—some for hundreds of miles!



Read Luke 2:1–7 and Matthew 2:1–6.

Think about It Some More

In Matthew's version of the Christmas story, at the spot where the wise men came to find baby Jesus, Matthew included a very special prophecy, which had been given by the prophet Micah. Long before Jesus was born, even before Mary and Joseph were born, God told Micah that a Savior would be born in Bethlehem. That tells us that Jesus was not born in Bethlehem by accident. All of it—even Caesar's census—was all a part of God's plan. God picked the town of Bethlehem, and God picked the perfect time. Later in the Bible, the apostle Paul said that Jesus was born at just the perfect moment in time according to God's plan (Galatians 4:4).

Talk about It

- ∴ How did the chief priests know that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem? (*The prophet Micah had written about it in his book in the Bible.*)
- ∴ How did Micah know which city Jesus was going to be born in long before it happened? (*God told Micah where Jesus was going to be born.*)
- ∴ Read Galatians 4:4. What do we learn about how Jesus was born from what Paul said in this verse? (*We learn that Jesus was born in the “fullness of time.” That simply means that he was born at the exact right time—the time God planned it. From Paul’s writing we learn that Jesus was born according to God’s plan at just the right time.*)
- ∴ How should God’s ability to plan all things encourage us? (*Not only was Jesus born at the perfect time, so were we! Read Acts 17:26. We are all a part of God’s perfect plan!*)



Pray about It

Praise God for the way he is in control of all things.

DAY TWO

Remember It

What do you remember about yesterday’s story? What do you think is going to happen in today’s story?



Read Luke 2:8–21.

Think about It Some More

Each year when families set out their Christmas decorations, a manger scene is often among them. It usually consists of a shepherd or two, a few animals, the wise men, Mary and Joseph, and the baby Jesus lying in a manger (a food box that animals eat from). Many children first learn the story of Christmas from their family’s manger scene.

Did you know that what those manger scenes depict is the story we read from Luke’s gospel today? Imagine what it would have been like to be one of the shepherds who saw the heavens opened with thousands of angels announcing Jesus’ birth. Or imagine Mary when the shepherds told her all they had seen. Or picture the wise men arriving sometime later to see the Savior. Next Christmas, when you set up your manger scene, remember that it tells a true story—a story that really happened!

Talk about It

- ∴ Can you think of a Christmas song that tells part of the story from our Bible passage today? (*Parents, see if your children can think of a Christmas song like “Silent Night” or “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” Take time to sing a verse or two. It is good not to limit your celebration of the Christmas story to December.*)

- ∴ What did the angel of the Lord tell the shepherds? *(The angel said he had good news of great joy for all people, and that the shepherds would find the Christ child lying in a manger.)*
- ∴ What did Mary do with the story the shepherds told her? *(She treasured it up in her heart.)*
- ∴ Why was the angels' message—that Jesus was born—considered good news? *(The announcement of Jesus' birth was good news because Jesus would grow up and one day die on the cross for our sins to open a way for us to live in heaven forever.)*



Pray about It

Sing your favorite Christmas hymn and then thank God for the good news—that Jesus Christ was born!

DAY THREE

Connect It to the Gospel

Today is the day we connect this week's Bible story to the gospel. The gospel is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for our salvation. Can anyone guess how our story this week looks forward to or back at the gospel?



Read Luke 2:10–11.

Think about It Some More

Even though these are the same verses we read yesterday, rereading them today encourages us to take a closer look at the angel's words to the shepherds.

Did you notice the angel of the Lord called Jesus a Savior? Savior is a word we use to describe someone who rescues someone else. A lifeguard who saves a drowning person could be called a savior—with a lowercase “s.” But when we call Jesus a Savior we use an uppercase “S” because Jesus was God who came as the Savior of the world. Jesus came to die on the cross and save everyone who believes in him from the punishment we deserve for our sins.

Talk about It

- ∴ What does the title savior mean? *(The title savior simply means someone who rescues someone else.)*
- ∴ Can you think of people who live around us that we could give that title to because they save people from danger? *(A lifeguard could be called a savior, as could a doctor who prescribes medicine to save us from disease, or a fireman who rescues people from a fire.)*
- ∴ How is Jesus a savior? *(Jesus came to die on the cross to save us from the punishment we deserve for our sins.)*
- ∴ Why do we use an uppercase “S” when we are calling Jesus Savior? *(We use an uppercase “S” because Jesus is God.)*



Pray about It

Thank Jesus for coming to earth as our Savior to die on the cross for our sins.

DAY FOUR

Remember It

What has God been teaching you this week through our Bible story?



Read Matthew 2:7–21.

Think about It Some More

God's plan is unstoppable. That means that no one can stop what God wants to do. But not long after Jesus was born, King Herod attempted to stop God's plan by trying to kill Jesus. Herod did not want someone else to be king. Nevertheless God's plan to bring a Savior to his people could not be stopped, even by a powerful king. When Herod found out he had been fooled by the wise men, he again tried to stop God's plan by having all the baby boys younger than two years old killed. But once again, God was a step ahead of the evil ruler and sent Jesus to Egypt until Herod was dead. Not only did God win the battle against Herod, God knew what would happen even before Herod was born.

Hundreds of years beforehand, the prophet Hosea foretold the day when Jesus would be sent to Egypt and then brought back out again. In Hosea 11:1, the prophet foretold this: "Out of Egypt I called my son." God was not surprised by Herod's threats; even those threats were a part of God's unstoppable plan.

Talk about It

- ● KIDS, ask your parents to tell you what their favorite part of the
- ● Christmas story is.

(Parents, think of the shepherds, wise men, or another part of the Christmas story and share what part you like best and why. Then ask your children to tell you what their favorite part of the story is.)

- ∴ Why did Herod want to kill the baby Jesus? *(Herod heard that Jesus was going to become a king. Herod wanted to be the only king in Israel.)*
- ∴ Why did God make sure to stop King Herod's evil plan? *(Parents, this is an interesting question. At first you might think that God would not allow anyone to kill his only Son, but then God did not stop the Jews from killing him on the cross. God did not allow Jesus to die as a baby because it was not God's plan. God sent his Son, Jesus, to die, but not as a baby. God's plan was for Jesus to die on the cross for our sins.)*



Pray about It

Thank God the Father for protecting the baby Jesus from Herod's evil plans.

DAY FIVE

Discover It

Today is the day we look at a different Bible passage—from the book of Psalms or one of the prophets—to see what we can learn from it about Jesus or our salvation.



Read Hosea 11:1–2.

Think about It Some More

Sometimes Bible passages have two meanings. In today's passage, Hosea was writing about Israel coming out of Egypt. Do you remember how God's people were slaves in Egypt and God sent Moses to deliver them? While the Holy Spirit moved Hosea to write about Israel, Matthew tells us that God was also using him to talk about Jesus.

It is amazing to think that long ago in Hosea's day God was already planning to send his Son, Jesus. God's plan to save his people from Egypt points us to Jesus. God gave hidden clues through the prophets of how he was going to do it. This passage in Hosea is one of God's hidden clues that Matthew reveals to us. If it were not for Matthew, we probably never would have guessed it. Looking back we can see that all history is directed by God.

Talk about It

- ∴ Parents, have your children recount as much of the exodus story (when God delivered Israel from Egypt) as they can remember.
- ∴ What other parts of the exodus story point to Jesus? (*The most important part that points to Jesus is when the blood of the lamb is placed on the doorframes of the Israelites so that the angel of death will pass over them. That points forward to when Jesus would die for our sins so that God's judgment would pass over us. See Exodus 12:6–12.*)
- ∴ How was God able to know that Jesus was going to go to Egypt and come back out again? (*God controls the future. God knows all things and makes all things happen. He is not a human like you and me; he is God over all.*)



Pray about It

Praise God for the way he knows and controls all things.