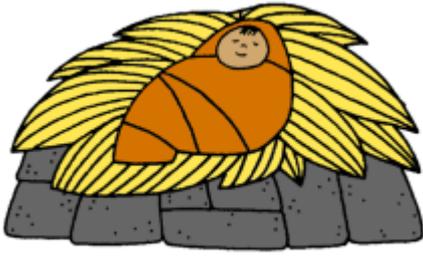


Birth of Jesus



Scripture Reference:

[Matthew 1:18-24](#) and [Luke 2:1-38](#)

Suggested Emphasis: God sent His son Jesus to the world to save us. We can celebrate and thank God for His gift.

Memory Verse: “For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son. God gave his Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life.” [John 3:16, ICB](#)

Story Overview:

Joseph and Mary travelled from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register for the census. While they were in Bethlehem, Jesus was born. The angel of the Lord told shepherds of Jesus’ birth. The shepherds went and worshipped Jesus.

Background Study:

Caesar Augustus ruled the Roman Empire (31 B.C. to A.D. 14). He wanted to find out how many people were in the empire, so he conducted a census. A census is often done in connection with collecting taxes.

“His own town” means the city from which a man’s family came. Joseph was a descendant of the family of David, so he and Mary travelled 110 kilometres (70 miles) south to Bethlehem. This is where the family records for David’s descendants were kept.

Mary was about to have a baby, but her child was the Son of God, not the son of Joseph. Still, Joseph took on the role of a father according to God’s will ([Matthew 1:18-25](#).)

Joseph and Mary needed to find a place quickly, but many others were also in Bethlehem because of the census. Most versions say something to the effect that “there was no room in the inn”, but this is more likely to refer to extra rooms in houses instead of a motel or hotel. Mary and Joseph found themselves in a more unusual place to stay, a room where families kept their animals.

Animals were precious assets to families. Some were for transportation, while others provided food. Keeping animals inside houses at night was a fairly common practice. Doing so protected the animals from thieves and bad weather.

In the case of Mary and Joseph, they made do with what was on hand. The animals’ feed box became a cot (crib) for Mary’s child. The cloths were the usual clothes for a new baby. They would have wrapped him more tightly than modern babies are wrapped.

There was much pastureland near Bethlehem. Several flocks of sheep might be brought together at night so each shepherd could take their turn at standing watch while the others slept. These watchmen guarded the sheep against wild animals or human thieves. In the night, the angel suddenly stood close by them, with the light of God’s glory shining all around. The angel didn’t want to frighten them. He came to bring good news for them and everybody else.

Christ was the descriptive title given to the Saviour whom Isaiah had promised; it means “Anointed One.” For hundreds of years, the Jewish people had been hoping for the “Anointed One” God had promised, and now He had arrived!

The angel knew the shepherds would want to see the Saviour, so he told them how they would recognise him when they had found him. There may have been other babies wrapped in cloths in Bethlehem, but probably only one had a manger for his bed.

Immediately after this, a crowd of angels appeared as suddenly as the first one had come and filled the sky with light and song.

The shepherds lost no time in going to see the Saviour. “Spread the word” may be translated as “made known thoroughly”, and some manuscripts say “made known.” The shepherds may not have told everybody in Bethlehem, but they shared the event with Joseph and Mary. Those who heard the story the shepherds told must have been puzzled by it. No doubt Mary remembered and thought about these things as long as she lived. For the shepherds, it was a night filled with praise to God.

Joseph and Mary followed Jewish law in how they set out to raise Jesus. They had him circumcised on the eighth day. When he was a few weeks old, they presented him at the Temple and offered sacrifices according to the purification rules of [Leviticus 12:1-8](#). At the Temple, they met first Simeon and then Anna.

([Luke 2:25-35](#)) Simeon was a good man who had been waiting for the coming of Christ. The Holy Spirit had previously told the aging Simeon that Christ would arrive within his lifetime. The Spirit led Simeon to the Temple that day and directly to Joseph and Mary. He blessed them and also prepared Mary for the thought that there would be sad days ahead.

([Luke 2:36-38](#)) Anna was a widow who had lived at the Temple for many years. She was a prophetess and a woman of prayer. When Anna overheard Simeon’s blessing, she immediately recognised the significance of this child. She went on to share the good news with many people.

Way to Introduce the Story:

(Make a poster using baby photos from the children and others in the church – both young and old. Be sure to include your own. Some pictures of teens in the congregation would also interest the children.) Let children guess who each of the babies is. Name the Father and Mother of each one mentioned and possibly where they were born. “Today we are going to learn about a very special baby. This is a baby who was sent especially by God. His mother’s name was Mary. Can anyone guess who His Father was? This baby was the Son of God. Today we are going to learn about how God sent His own son as a special gift to everyone in the world.”

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The Story:

Joseph and Mary lived in the town of Nazareth. They were “betrothed”, which meant they were planning to get married.

But before Joseph and Mary actually lived together or got married, Mary had a visit from the angel Gabriel to tell her she was going to have a baby. This baby was going to be special, and she was to name him “Jesus.” Mary’s baby would be the saviour of the world.

Mary’s unborn baby did not have a father on earth. He was different from all other babies because His father was God.

Something like this had never happened before, so it was very difficult for Joseph to understand. The angel came to Joseph in a dream and explained what it meant and what God wanted Joseph to do. After Joseph woke up, he married Mary so he could take care of her and the baby just like a father would.

Joseph and Mary lived in a town called Nazareth. The Romans were in charge of the country. One day, the ruler of the country, Caesar Augustus, sent a letter to all the regions he ruled saying that all the people had to go to the city where their families came from. Every person in the family had to be counted. This was called a census. He wanted to know exactly how many people there were because he wanted everyone to pay taxes.

Since Joseph's family had originally come from a little town called Bethlehem, that is where he went to be counted for the census.

Bethlehem was a long way from Nazareth. Of course, there were no planes or cars back then. People had to walk or ride animals. They packed up their things because Joseph and Mary had to do what the king commanded. Mary rode a donkey while Joseph walked beside her. They began their trip to Bethlehem.

When they arrived, they found the roads very crowded with people. They searched for a place to stay, but all the houses were filled with other people who had come to Bethlehem for the same reason. It was growing very late. Mary was tired. It was almost time for her baby to be born. Joseph was also tired and needed a place to rest.

But God had not forgotten Mary and Joseph. He took care of them. They found a place where animals were kept and were glad to find a quiet place to rest after their long journey.

During the night, a wonderful thing happened. Mary had her baby. Mary was so happy. It was a son, just as the angel had said. He was the Son of God. Joseph and Mary gave Him the name of "Jesus."

Joseph looked for a place to put the newborn baby. He found a box full of straw. This was the kind of box that farmers put hay in so the animals could eat from it. It was called a manger. Mary fixed the straw and put a piece of cloth on it. Then she wrapped the baby tightly and placed Him in the warm straw.

Meanwhile, outside the city, some shepherds were watching over their flocks of sheep in the quiet night.

Suddenly, a great light filled the dark sky. They had never seen anything like it before. It was night, but a bright light showed around the angel. The angel spoke to them. He said, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today, in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly, there was not only one angel but, instead, many angels praising God, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favour rests!"

After this, the angels returned to heaven.

Once the angels had left, the shepherds left their sheep and hurried into the town of Bethlehem. The angel had said that the baby would be born in "the town of David." Everyone knew that another name for the city of David was Bethlehem, so that is where they went!

The shepherds found Joseph, Mary, and the baby just as the angels said. They told Mary and Joseph all about the wonderful sight of the angels in the middle of the great light and the wonderful words they said. The shepherds were glad they found this special baby whose birth made even the angels happy.

Of all the gifts anyone could ever give, the shepherds knew that God's gift was the best. God had given this little baby to the world.

Joseph and Mary cared for their new baby and were careful to follow all religious rules for Jewish families. Their baby son was circumcised on the eighth day after he was born and then they took him to the Temple in Jerusalem when he was only a few weeks old.

At the Temple, they were spotted by an elderly man named Simeon. Simeon was a very good man who understood that God was going to send someone to help all of the Jewish people and even the whole world. He had been waiting and waiting. Earlier, the Holy Spirit had come to him and told him that he would get to see the Christ before he died.

Then, the Holy Spirit led Simeon straight to them on the day Joseph and Mary brought little Jesus.

Simeon was so happy to see this very important baby. He took Jesus into his arms and blessed him. He said that Jesus would bring salvation to the world. Some people would accept Jesus, and some people would not. He told Mary that it would not always be easy. Sometimes, things would happen to her son, and that would make her sad.

Anna, an elderly prophetess who lived at the Temple, overheard Simeon talking about Jesus. She knew that this baby was special. From then on, Anna talked about Jesus to everyone willing to hear.

God sent his Son, Jesus, to the earth to save us. The birth of Jesus was the arrival of an amazing gift for the whole world!

Teacher Wisdom Concerning Children and Christmas:

Of course, the birth of Jesus is the main event of Christmas. Families and cultures treat other traditions and make-believe parts of the holidays differently. Teach the truth of Jesus and refer to the Bible as the actual record. At the same time, we suggest you respect others and try not to spoil the “imaginary fun” of the season.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download the slideshow](#), or [click here to download the pictures to print](#).

Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

[Click here for an additional slideshow and illustrations for this story.](#)

Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story, while reflection questions encourage them to internalize its meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child’s spiritual development and help them connect to God. [Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.](#)

Review:

1. Who was the mother of Jesus? (Mary)
2. Who was Mary’s husband? (Joseph)
3. In what city was Jesus born? (Bethlehem)
4. Why did Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem? (To register for the census)
5. What did baby Jesus have for his first cot or bed? (A manger)
6. To whom did the angels tell the good news of Jesus’ birth? (Shepherds)
7. What did the shepherds do when they heard about Jesus’ birth? (They went to find Jesus and told Mary and Joseph what they had seen and heard from the angel)
8. What was special about Jesus? (He was God’s Son, and he was sent to save all the people in the world)
9. What did Simeon do when he saw Jesus at the Temple? (He blessed Jesus, spoke about him, and told Mary that some sad things would happen with Jesus)
10. Who else wanted to see Jesus at the Temple? (Anna, an elderly prophetess who believed Jesus was the Saviour)

Reflection:

1. What do you wonder about in this story?
2. What part of this story do you find most interesting?
3. How do you think Mary felt on the journey from their home to Bethlehem?
4. What do you think the town of Bethlehem looked, smelled or sounded like?
5. Do you think Mary and Joseph were worried about finding a place to stay that night in Bethlehem? Why or why not?
6. What do you think the shepherds felt or thought when they saw the angel and all the hosts in the sky appear to them?
7. Why do you think God wanted the angel to appear to shepherds?
8. Jesus was God's gift to the world. What do you love most about Jesus?
9. What is Jesus like?
10. Who do you want to know about Jesus? (Suggestion: pray together)

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. [A variety of prayer methods are found here.](#)

Song Suggestions:

- Sing appropriate Christmas carols that depict the biblical story. You'll find many examples of lyrics online:
 - Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem
 - Silent Night
 - O Holy Night
 - The First Noel
 - Joy to the World
 - Oh, Come All Ye Faithful
 - Angels We Have Heard on High
 - Away in a Manger
 - It Came Upon the Midnight Clear.
 - Go Tell It on the Mountain
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

Activities:

- As you sing "Christmas" carols, talk about what they mean. Which ones depict the birth of Jesus (like Silent Night)? Which are made-up stories or make-believe (like Rudolf the Red-nosed Reindeer)? Compare them to the biblical story.
- For younger children, bring a doll, hay, and blankets and practice putting the baby to bed.
- Nativity sets (the kind you can buy at Christmas) can be good for the children to act out the story.

- Find Nazareth and Bethlehem in a bible atlas. Compare the travel distance to the distance to modern towns in your area. Discuss what it must have been like for a heavily pregnant woman to make the journey.
- Let one of the children retell the story while the other children provide sound effects.



Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable

reflection page. [Free printables for this story.](#)

Crafts:

- Use nativity scenes from old Christmas cards to make a card announcing the birth of Jesus.
- [Make a scroll. Click here for instructions.](#) Write this verse on it: “For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” [Isaiah 9:6-7, ICB](#)
- Make an angel craft. Many religious bookstores sell angel items.
- Use a hand puppet to tell or review the story from a different point of view. Try telling it from the point of view of a shepherd, angel, one of the animals in the place where Jesus’ family slept, Joseph, Mary, etc. [Instructions for making Spoon or Finger Puppets.](#)



Print bookmarks, trading cards or timelines ([printable pages](#)).

- Visit the [Teaching Ideas](#) page for additional activities and crafts.

Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page with text \(Ministry Spark\)](#)
- [Colouring page and puzzle worksheets about the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph and Mary \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Colouring page and worksheets about Gabriel’s visit to both Mary and Joseph \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Colouring page and worksheets about Mary’s visit to Elizabeth \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Colouring page and worksheets about angels appearing to shepherds \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Colouring page of baby Jesus in manger \(Christian answers\)](#)
- [Colouring page of Mary and the angel \(Christian answers\)](#)
- [Colouring page of shepherds and angels \(Christian answers\)](#)
- [Colouring page of Mary, Jesus in manger and shepherd boy \(Christian answers\)](#)
- [Colouring page of animals, manger and baby Jesus \(Christian answers\)](#)
- [Colouring page of Luke 2:11 \(NIV\) \(Teacher help\)](#)
- [Colouring page of Isaiah 9:6 \(NIV\)\(Teacher help\)](#)

- [Craft: Mary and Jesus toilet paper roll figures \(Sunday school crafts\)](#)
- [Various crafts \(Sunday school crafts\)](#)
- [Craft: Make a camel for a nativity scene \(Printable\) \(Learn create love\)](#)
- [Worksheet, Simple dot-to-dot of a manger \(Christian answers\)](#)

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