

The Birth of Jesus



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Bethlehem

A poor man and his wife were going on a long, tiring journey. How they were travelling we do not know—whether walking, or perhaps on a donkey. They were on their way to a little town called Bethlehem. The man's name was Joseph and his wife was called Mary.

They must have been very weary when they arrived as they had come a long way. But there was nowhere they could stay. The inn where most people stayed was full. There was no room at all for them. What a disappointment! What could they do? Stay out all night in the streets?

The best place they could find was a stable—a place where cows or horses are kept. It would be cold and not too clean. Not a very nice place! But it was better than sleeping outside.

And that very night Mary had a baby boy. His name was Jesus. And when He had been wrapped up, the only place there was to put Him was in the manger—the trough in which the cows fed. We wonder if there were any cows with their little calves there at the time? Or horses or donkeys stabled there?

Why was the baby called Jesus? (It means “the Saviour.”) Well, long before that night an angel from heaven had come to visit Mary and had told

her she was going to have a baby, and God Himself would be that baby's Father—not Joseph. The baby was to be different from all other babies because He was the Son of God.

Then, later, the angel had come to Joseph and told him too about this wonderful baby. He had told Joseph what His name would be. He was to be called Jesus “for He shall save His people from their sins.”

So now this wonderful baby had been born—in a stable. How Joseph and Mary loved that little baby as He lay there in the manger! And God in heaven was pleased.

Yet all Bethlehem was asleep. And no one knew what a wonderful thing had taken place.

God had said that when He sent His Son He would be born in the little town of Bethlehem. That is why, just before the baby's birth, Joseph and Mary had to leave their home in Nazareth. The Roman rulers had commanded them to go to Bethlehem so their names could be written down for taxing.

Perhaps some of you have a baby brother or sister. How carefully everything was made ready before they were born; but when Jesus, the Son of God came, He was born in a poor stable. How great His love!

There is a verse which says: “Ye know the grace

of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor.”

You can read this story in Luke chapter 2, verses 1 to 7. See also Matthew chapter 1, verses 18 to 25, and Luke chapter 1, verses 26 to 37.

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie;
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1. 15).

The Shepherds

Out in the fields outside Bethlehem there were shepherds looking after their sheep. Though it was the middle of the night they still had to be there. Perhaps a lion or bear was prowling about, waiting to seize a little lamb. Each night, whether cold or hot, wet or dry, there they had to be watching their sheep out in the fields.

But whatever is happening? Who is that bright figure they can see? And what is that dazzling light that is shining round about them? They were terrified. Surely this must be an angel!

But then the angel spoke to them—so kindly. He told them there was no need for them to be frightened. He had come from heaven to tell them about the wonderful baby who had been born in Bethlehem while everyone was asleep. This baby was “the Saviour, Christ the Lord.”

The shepherds were amazed to hear that the long expected Saviour had now come. But what a shock! If they wanted to find the baby, they would not have to go to a palace, certainly not to King Herod’s palace. They would find the baby, of all places, “lying in a manger.” So first they must look for a stable!

But before they had time to do anything, or even talk to one another, suddenly the sky was filled



with a host of glorious angels, all singing:

“GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN.”

It must have been the sweetest song that was ever heard on earth. But think of it! The wonderful baby is born in Bethlehem. The Saviour has come, but no one knows, no one cares. Yet God sends a host of holy angels, bright and glorious, from heaven to celebrate the birth of His beloved Son. Jesus always had been the Son of God; but now He had come to earth to be born as a baby.

Then the angels disappeared. They had gone back to heaven. The shepherds looked at one another. “Let us go to Bethlehem, and see this thing,” they said. They knew that it was God who had let them know. How kind and gracious of the great God in heaven to send a message about Jesus to a few poor shepherds!

So they hurried as quickly as they could to find the stable and the manger. But what about the sheep? Well, they could trust God to look after them. Really, now they had heard such good news, they must forget about everything else.

And there, when they had reached the town, they found everything just as God had said—“Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.”

What do you think they did? They were so pleased that they told everyone what had

happened, and everyone was amazed. But we do not read of one single person going to find the Saviour. How strange!

We do not know what happened afterwards to the shepherds. We do not even know their names, or how many there were, or whether they were old or young. But the last we hear of them is that they were praising God. Their hearts were full of joy. They had seen the long-expected Saviour, Jesus the Son of God.

You can read this story in Luke chapter 2, verses 8 to 19.

Angels from the realms of glory,
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;
Ye who sang creation's story,
Now proclaim Messiah's birth;
Come and worship,
Worship Christ, the new-born King.

“He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name” (John 1. 10-13).



Mary

When the shepherds had left the stable, Jesus' mother Mary did not say anything. She was silent. Often we read of Mary being silent. But there were many things she was thinking about.

Did she think about what the angel told her before Jesus was born? "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the highest." And did she think about the beautiful hymn she composed? (Did you know that Mary wrote a lovely hymn?) It begins, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

At this time though, she must have wondered especially at the story the shepherds had told her—of the angel, and what he had said, and the host of angels from heaven and their song.

Yes, Mary, was a very happy woman. She had the great blessing of having a baby different from all other babies that have ever been born. She knew that this baby was truly God. How she loved Him and cared for Him! And we know that as Jesus grew up, He dearly loved His mother, and was always kind to her.

Some people worship Mary but we must not do this; we must only worship God. Nor can we pray to Mary for Mary is now dead.

How amazing that Mary's baby is true, almighty

God!

No less almighty at His birth,
Than on His throne supreme;
His shoulders held up heaven and earth,
When Mary held up Him.

You can read about Mary especially in Luke chapter 1, verses 26 to 56, and Luke chapter 2, verses 16 to 19 (as well as the passages given in the other chapters).

He dwelt in the manger,
That heavenly Stranger,
Where oxen had trod;
And she who found favour
With God called Him Saviour,
And knew Him as God.

“When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law” (Galatians 4. 4, 5).

Once in royal David’s city,
Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her baby
In a manger for His bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child.

Simeon

At this time there was an old man who lived in Jerusalem, about six miles away from Bethlehem. He was a good and gracious man, and he had a secret. God had told him that before he died he would actually see the long-expected Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Many good people had hoped that one day they would see Him, but they had been disappointed.

One day something special seemed to be happening. Simeon felt that he must go along to the temple. He had been there many times in his life, but now God was speaking to him telling him he *must* go today. So along he went.

And then something happened. A man and his wife entered the temple. Nothing strange about that. But it was Joseph and Mary and they were carrying the baby Jesus. He was now just over a month old. They were doing what God had told them to do—presenting the baby to God in the temple, and offering a sacrifice. And the only sacrifice they could afford was the one poor people offered: not a lamb, or a bull, but just two pigeons.

As Simeon looked on the pair, he realised that this little baby was his Saviour and his God. The long-awaited day had come. O how happy he must have been! God had done what He promised, and



there was his Lord before his eyes.

Like some old prophet Simeon picked up the Lord Jesus and held Him in his arms. Then he thanked God for all His kindness and love. He felt willing to die. He had got what he had been waiting for. He said, “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.”

Those who wait for God are not disappointed.

Joseph and Mary listened intently. How amazed they were to hear some of the wonderful things Simeon said about the baby!

Simeon ended by blessing them. But then he had some sad things to say. He told Mary of the sorrow which she would one day know.

So while He was still a baby there was this reminder that “Christ was born to die.” He had been born at Bethlehem, but one day He must suffer and die on the cross at Calvary.

You can read this story in Luke chapter 2, verses 25 to 35.

He came down to earth from heaven
Who is God and Lord of all;
And His shelter was a stable,
And His cradle was a stall;
With the poor, and mean, and lowly,
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9. 6).