

Bi132 The Gospels

Lesson Bi132-4 Birth of Jesus

Giving birth can be a frightening experience for a woman, especially the first time. The birth of a child presents other challenges for the new parents too—loss of sleep, added expenses, and learning to care for a newborn. Often family members are there to share both the excitement and unexpected difficulties. Our story for this lesson considers Mary and Joseph, who were about to become new parents. They left home late in Mary’s pregnancy. They traveled 130 kilometers in order to register for a census in Joseph’s home town of Bethlehem. The Bible does not say whether they walked the whole way or rode on some animal, like a donkey. When they arrived, there was no housing to be found, only a stable where animals were kept. There is no record of a midwife or family members present, but in the middle of all this, the birth of Jesus caused both the parents and all of heaven to rejoice!

At that time Caesar, the Roman ruler over the Jews, ordered that everyone should be counted so they could be taxed. Everyone was to go to his home town to register. So Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea, where his ancestor David had been born. He went there to register with Mary, who was engaged to him and was expecting her first child. While they were there the baby was born, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in the animals’ feeding trough, called a manger, because there was no room available for them in the inn.

There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, watching their flocks that night. An angel appeared to them, and the glory of God shone around them. The shepherds were terrified, but the angel said, “Do not be afraid. I am bringing you news of great joy that will be for all peoples. Today in Bethlehem the Savior, the Messiah, was born. This will be the sign; you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly the place was filled with a great multitude of angels, singing praise to God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:1-14).

If you had been one of those shepherds, what would you have done after the angels had left and gone back into the sky?

Luke tells us that the shepherds immediately said, “Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” So they hurried to town and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the feeding trough, just as they had been told. After seeing him, they spread the word that had been told them about this child. The entire town was amazed at what the shepherds reported to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and considered their meaning in her heart. And the shepherds went back to their sheep. They were glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which had happened just as the angel had said.

God arranged a census at just that time, so Jesus was born in Bethlehem as the prophet had foretold. Jesus was born in a stable where animals were kept, not in a palace. Shepherds were the first to hear God's announcement and to behold the miracle of the newborn Messiah. It was not until a couple of years later that God sent wise men from a far country. They made the Messiah's presence known to both religious and political leaders in Israel. In all these events we see the hand of God working to accomplish his purposes through people who believed.

This story is **important** because it shows how God uses circumstances and ordinary events to accomplish his plan. It reveals that God is very aware of what is happening here on earth.

The **main truth** of this story is that Jesus was born of a human mother, but his Father is the only God. This coming of God to earth in human form is called the 'incarnation.' It was the beginning of God's plan to redeem people from sin through the death of Jesus, the sinless One.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. Whom did God send to announce the birth of his Son Jesus?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said, "He sent angels to announce Jesus' birth," you are correct.
2. What did the shepherds do after the angels left them?
A. [Pause 5 seconds.] If you said, "They went to Bethlehem to see if what the angel said had really happened," you are correct.
3. What was the response of Mary to all the events surrounding the birth of Jesus?
A. [Pause 5 seconds.] If you said, "Mary remembered all these things and pondered them in her heart," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to this story several times, until you can tell it to someone who has never heard it before. Then ask this question and discuss, "What was the response of each person or group of people in this story to the birth of the Messiah, Jesus?"