

The birth of Jesus.. the reason for the season

The Christmas Story

Christmas traditions focus on several different aspects of family and spiritual life. While many stories are shared around Christmastime, perhaps none bears more significance than the origin of the Christmas celebration. Sharing the Christmas story is an integral part of holiday gatherings, reminding families that faith is foremost during this festive time of year.

The Conception of Jesus

Mary was a woman living in the Galilee area of Nazareth. She was engaged to a Jewish carpenter named Joseph. The angel Gabriel visited the Virgin Mary and told her that she would conceive a child - a son - by the power of the Holy Spirit.

“Peace be with you,” Gabriel said to Mary. “God has blessed you and is pleased with you.”

“Don't be afraid, God has been very kind to you. You will become pregnant by the Holy Spirit and give birth to a baby boy and you will call him Jesus. He will be God's own Son and His kingdom will never end.”

Mary was very afraid but she trusted God. “Let it happen as God chooses,” She replied.

Mary questioned the angel, who reassured her that anything was possible by God and that Jesus would be God's own son.

Gabriel also told Mary that her cousin, Elizabeth who everyone thought was too old to have children, would have a baby boy whom God had chosen to

prepare the way for Jesus.

Joseph was troubled when he found out Mary was with child and even considered breaking their engagement, which was allowed under Jewish law.

But God soon sent another angel, this time to Joseph, in a dream. The angel reassured Joseph that his marriage to Mary and the birth of this child were His will.

“Don't be afraid to have Mary as your wife,” the angel explained, telling Joseph that Mary had been chosen by God to be the mother of His Son. The angel also told Joseph that the baby would be named Jesus which means 'Saviour' because He would save people.

Joseph awoke from his dream and took Mary as his wife soon after, ready and willing to raise the child despite the public humiliation he may experience.

The Census

During this time the Romans had control over many parts of the world, including where Joseph and Mary resided. Ruler Caesar Augustus decreed that every person living under Roman rule had to return to his town of origin to participate in a census so everyone could be taxed accordingly. Joseph, hailing from Bethlehem, had to return to this town with his very pregnant bride.

Mary and Joseph travelled a long way (about 70 miles) from Nazareth to Bethlehem, because that is where Joseph's family came from. Most people walked but some lucky people had a donkey to help carry the goods needed for the journey. Joseph and Mary travelled very slowly because Mary's baby was due to be born soon.

They traveled for many days and, upon arriving in Bethlehem, found that the

inns were full and there was no available lodging. Mary and Joseph took shelter in a stable and prepared to welcome their son.

Jesus’ Arrival

Upon reaching Bethlehem they had problems finding somewhere to stay. So many people had come to register their names in the census that every house was full and every bed was taken in all of the guest rooms.

According to the Gospel of Luke, Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son, while in the stable. In those days it was the custom to wrap newborn babies tightly in a long cloth called 'swaddling clothes'. Jesus' bed was the manger from which the animals ate their hay.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.- Luke Chapter 2

Many people visited the baby Jesus, including three wise men from the East who traveled by following a guiding star to bestow gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh

on the baby king.

When the Wise Men had gone, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” the angel said, “take Jesus and Mary and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for Jesus to kill Him.” So Joseph got up, took Jesus and Mary during the night they left for Egypt, where he stayed until Herod died.

When Herod realized that he had been tricked by the Wise Men, he was furious and he gave orders to kill all the boys aged two or younger in Bethlehem and the surrounding area. This was to try and kill the new King, as his plan to find the location of the new king from the Wise Men had failed.

After Herod had died, Joseph had another dream in which an angel appeared to him. The angel said, “Get up, take Jesus and Mary and go back to Israel, for those who were trying kill Jesus are dead.”

So Joseph got up, took Jesus and Mary and they went back to Israel. But when he heard that Herod's son was now king of Judea, he was afraid to go there. So instead they went to Galilee, and lived in their old town of Nazareth.



Christmas tidbits to put you in the holiday spirit

The holiday season has arrived, and millions of people across the globe will be celebrating Christmas with their families and friends. The following are some interesting tidbits to share with your loved ones this holiday season.

- ★ Each year, more than three billion Christmas cards are sent in the United States alone.
- ★ In 350 AD, Pope Julius I, bishop of Rome, proclaimed December 25 the official celebration date for the birth of Jesus Christ. Many historians and theologians have surmised that Christ really wasn't born this time of year, thanks to imagery and information from the Bible.
- ★ Christmas carols began as an English custom called 'was-sailing.' Individuals toasted neighbors to a long and healthy life.
- ★ Santa Claus' modern look was inspired by writings from The Knickerbockers of New York and imagery from Clement Clarke Moore's "A Visit from St. Nicholas." Moore denied authoring the famous poem for 15 years after it was published anonymously, feeling the poem was beneath his talents.
- ★ Santa has his own official postal code. It's H0 H0 H0.
- ★ The song "Jingle Bells" was originally written for Thanksgiving and not Christmas. People loved it so much that the lyrics were changed to fit Christmas.
- ★ Christmas trees typically grow for 15 years before they're cut and sold. This means the trees sold today were likely planted around the start of the new millenium.
- ★ Christmas was not declared an official holiday in the United States until June 26, 1870.
- ★ Before turkey, the traditional Christmas meal served in England was a pig's head and mustard.
- ★ Male reindeer tend to shed their antlers in the winter. This means Santa's reindeer are likely female.
- ★ Many people may be less inclined to stand under mistletoe waiting for a kiss if they knew what 'mistletoe' means in the ancient Germanic language. It literally means 'dung on a twig,' for the bird who eats the berries and leaves seeds in droppings to start new plants.
- ★ Each year, experts figure the costs of the gifts in the song, "The 12 Days of Christmas." The price index for the gifts went from \$12,673 in 1984 to more than \$34,000 today. The most expensive gift is the swimming swans.



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