The story of the birth of Jesus

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. An angel visited the Virgin Mary and told her that she would conceive a child - a son - by the power of the Holy Spirit. When the son was born, she would name him Jesus. Mary questioned the angel, who reassured her that anything was possible by God and that Jesus would be God's own son.

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. 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.

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

According to the Gospel of Luke, Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son, while in the stable. She wrapped him in cloth and placed him in a manger because there was no guest room available for them.

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 Joseph and Mary had performed all the things necessary according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Nazareth with Jesus, who was growing strong in spirit and filled with wisdom and the grace of God.

A Christmas Howler!

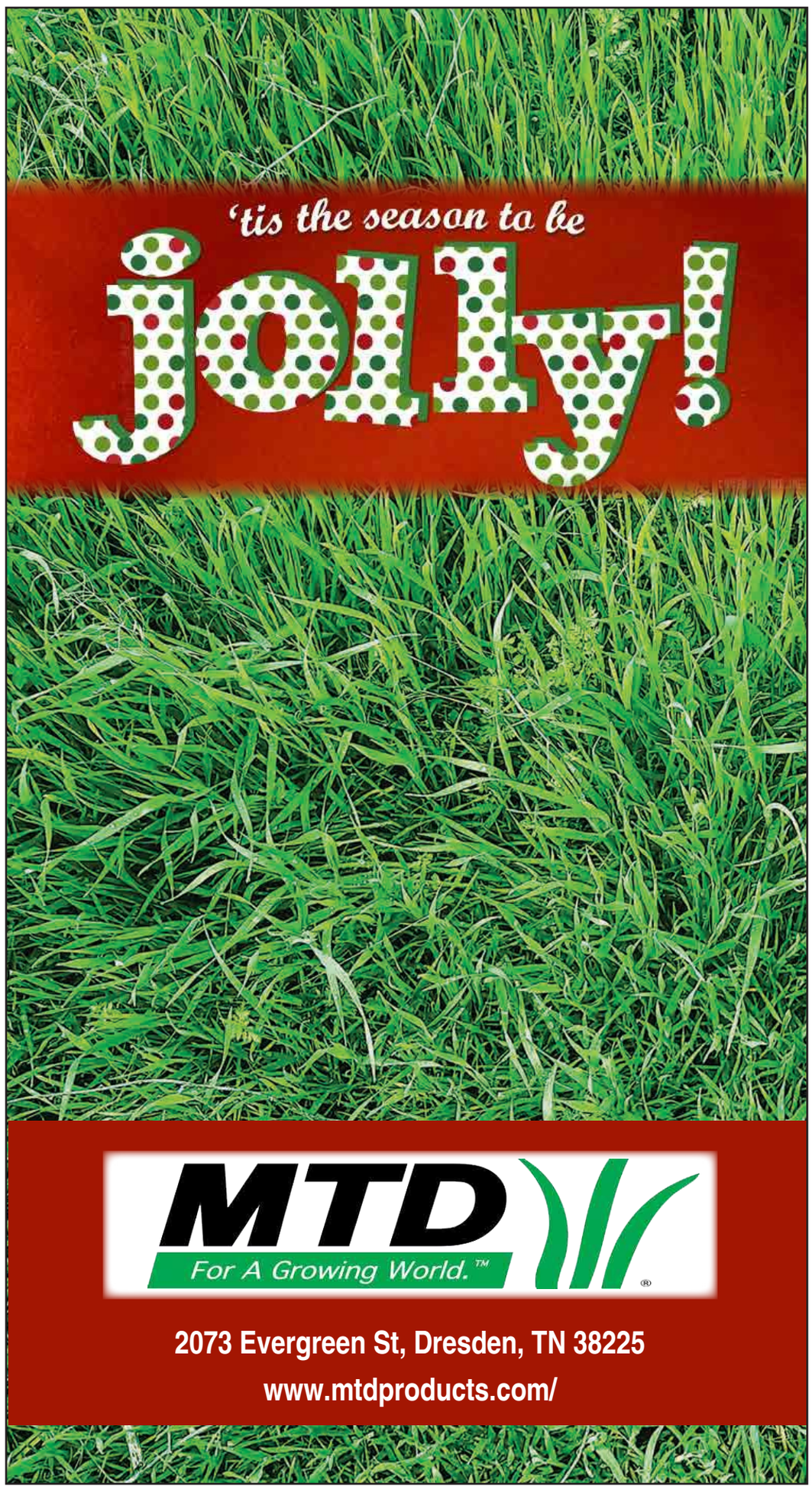
Here's a funny little tale.

...When the Sunday School class had finished singing, "Silent Night", they were told the story of the Nativity.

The children were asked to make a drawing of the scene as they thought it might look. After a little while, the teacher passed among them to see how they were doing.

She stopped at one little boy who had nearly finished. She complimented him on his drawing of Joseph and Mary and the baby in the manger, but noticed a fat roly-poly figure set to one side.

"Who is that?" she asked. "It's Round John Virgin", the boy replied.



The Miracle of the Poinsettia!

At Christmas in Mexico, most houses display the Poinsettia. Just as we have Holly, Misletoe and the Christmas Tree, the Mexicans have the poinsettia. They believe that the beautiful plant brings a blessing that will last all year. The tradition has existed since 1834 when a miracle occurred in a tiny village.

In those days it was customary for people in the villages to take gifts to the Baby Jesus at Christmas Eve. Little Maria, a poor peasant girl had no gift, but she did so want to enter the church and see the Baby Jesus in His crib.

She stood outside, watching others as they entered, carrying their gifts. Some took food, some took crochet and lacework. Others carried flowers. But little Maria had nothing. One lady passed her with a huge bundle of flowers in her arms. As she walked by, a leaf fell from the enormous bunch and landed at Maria's feet. She picked it up and thought, "I will take this leaf".

Others saw Maria pick up the leaf and smiled as she carefully wrapped it in her small handkerchief. And then, clutching her tiny gift, Maria entered the church. She took her place at the end of the line of people waiting to make their offerings. Then at last, it was Maria's turn. She stretched out her arm and carefully opened her fingers to place the leaf on the altar in front of the crib.

There was a gasp from the adults who had seen Maria fold the leaf into her tiny handkerchief. For as her fingers separated, it was seen that the little peasant girl was now holding a beautiful flower. The miraculous bloom was formed like a star with brilliant scarlet leaves

Word of the miracle spread quickly through the church and people fell to their knees. The gift of the Poinsettia came to be known as "The Flower of the Holy Night".