

On Christmas Night . . .

1

A Baby was Born

Over 2000 years ago, in a little town called Bethlehem, not far from Jerusalem in what is now called Israel, a baby was born to Mary and Joseph. God had sent an angel to ask Mary if she would have a baby which would be his son, and she had said “yes”. Joseph had also been visited by an angel to tell him that it was all right to marry Mary because the baby she was expecting was from God. Their home was Nazareth, many miles to the north, so what were they doing in Bethlehem?

Why Bethlehem? Why a stable?

The Romans, who occupied the country, had decided that everybody must be registered in the town their family came from. Joseph’s family, which went right back to the famous King David, came from Bethlehem. He and Mary had walked from their home in Nazareth for several days to get to Bethlehem, and when they got there they discovered that the town was so busy that there were no rooms available anywhere. Eventually a kind innkeeper, who could see that Mary was very tired and that she was expecting a baby, let them sleep in a stable at the back of his inn, where his customers’ donkeys were kept.

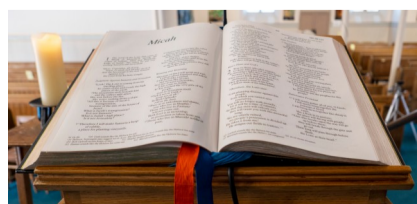
That night the baby was born, and they laid him in the manger on the soft hay. They called him Jesus, which means “Saviour”.

Surprise Visitors

Later that night they must have been surprised when shepherds arrived straight off the hills outside Bethlehem. Angels had told them of the birth of their Saviour and they had hurried to the stable, where they were thrilled to see the baby, and worshipped him. (You can read the story of the shepherds on the post behind you.)

Please step inside and see Mary and Joseph and the baby, and the visiting shepherds.

The story of the birth of Jesus can be found in St. Luke’s Gospel, Chapter 2, verses 1-7



THE WORD FOR TODAY

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2

On the hills outside Bethlehem one shepherd was looking after all the sheep. There was just one shepherd because the others had all rushed off to Bethlehem to find the baby God had sent to be their Saviour. Somebody had to stay behind. The Bible doesn't tell us this, but sheep were valuable, and the shepherds would never leave them out on the hills alone.

It had been an exciting night. First one angel had appeared in the sky and frightened them all. He had told them not to be scared but to be joyful because tonight a baby had been born in Bethlehem who was their Saviour and Lord, the Messiah God had promised. Then a whole crowd of angels had appeared, lighting up the sky, singing "Glory to God in the highest".

They just had to go and see for themselves, and they hurried down to Bethlehem and found the stable where Jesus was lying in the manger. These humble shepherds were the first people to hear of the birth of Jesus and the first people to be able to worship him as their Lord and Saviour.

After they had visited the stable they returned to the hills, but telling everybody they saw on the way about the coming of God's promised Saviour.

Lord, please give us the willingness of the shepherds to believe your message and go to find the baby and worship him.

Let us find time at Christmas as they did to welcome Jesus into our lives.

The story of the shepherds can be found in St. Luke's Gospel, Chapter 2, verses 8-16



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3

Far away in the deserts of the East (possibly where Iran is now), there were wise men who looked at the stars and interpreted their meaning. On Christmas night they spotted a new bright star which they were sure meant that there was a new king. They were very interested in this, and decided to travel to find him.

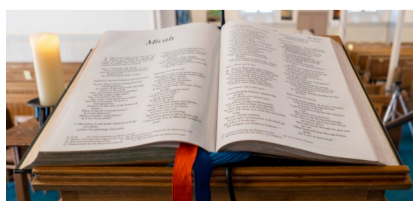
They collected some gifts, which seemed strange at the time, but in fact turned out to be appropriate for what Jesus would do later in his life. The gifts they chose were gold (because he was a king), frankincense (because he was holy—and we know he was the son of God), and myrrh (used at the time of death—and we know that Jesus died to save us all). We don't know from the Bible how many wise men there were; people assume there were three, because there were three gifts.

They set off, following the star, which eventually led them to Bethlehem. It would take them some time to get there.

*What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him,
Give my heart.*

(From the carol "In the bleak midwinter" by Christina Rossetti)

The story of the wise men can be found in St. Matthew's Gospel, chapter 2, 1-12



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