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THE ANGELS' ANNOUNCEMENT

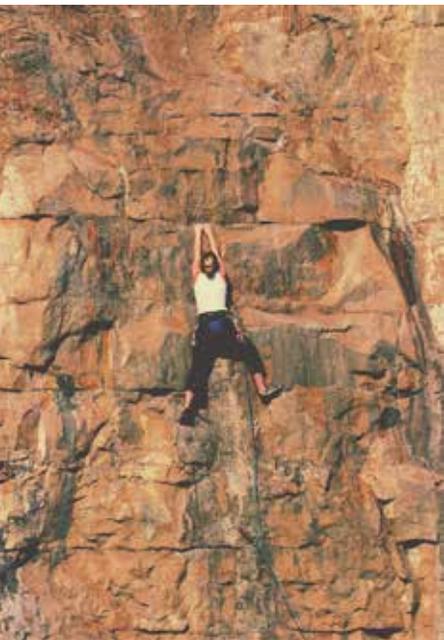


*What's the most interesting road trip
you've taken?*

QUESTION #1

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE **41**

Jesus came for our salvation.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

'Tis the season to be . . . traveling. Some of us travel constantly, while others rarely leave our own communities. Wherever you fall in that spectrum, it's likely you have traveled during the Christmas season.

Traveling for Christmas is nothing new. The reason we even have Christmas started with a journey—Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem. I doubt it was an easy trip, either.

When my wife and I were expecting our first child, she read a book about pregnancy that validated her extreme exhaustion. The book claimed the energy of a woman's pregnant body at rest exerted more energy than a nonpregnant mountain climber.¹ On several occasions, I heard my exhausted wife declare, "I was just climbing mountains."

The story of Jesus' birth is one of a journey. Joseph and Mary may have felt like their trip included "climbing mountains!" But the story includes an even greater journey. Jesus, the Son of God, left the glories of His throne in heaven to journey to earth. He came as an infant with one sole purpose: to bring us salvation.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Luke 2:1-7

¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered. ² This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³ So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, ⁵ to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ Then she gave birth to her firstborn Son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

“A decree went out from Caesar Augustus.” This particular Caesar was born Gaius Octavius and was the adopted son of Julius Caesar. He was given the honorary title of Augustus as a sign of religious veneration. Under his long reign, the Roman Empire grew and flourished. He ordered the entire Empire to be registered, and for this registration, Joseph and Mary made the ninety-mile trek to Bethlehem.

It is significant that Christ was born in Bethlehem. Both Mary and Joseph were descendants of David; thus, Bethlehem was their ancestral home. Micah had prophesied eight hundred years earlier that Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the Messiah: “Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; one will come from you to be ruler over Israel for me. His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times” (Mic. 5:2).

Micah’s prophecy was intended to bring comfort to the despairing Israelites. In contrast to their broken situation, a great ruler would come to truly shepherd God’s people. And He did come, at another time when God’s people faced outside oppression.

How do the circumstances of Jesus’ birth help you relate to Him?

QUESTION #2

When the Messiah came—when Jesus was born—Mary “laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.” We’re not sure of the exact nature of this location, although it implies that this type of quarters was usually a place occupied by animals. We’ve often heard, “There was no room in the inn,” assuming the family was left outside. But Jesus used the same word in sending the disciples to ask about a “guest room” to prepare for the Passover meal. (See Luke 22:11.)

It is possible that Mary and Joseph were in a home, even a relative’s home, but they were staying in a separate area where the animals were brought at night. In any case, the only available space to lay the newborn Jesus was in the animal trough attached to the wall between the living quarters and the area where the animals were kept. The feeding trough or *manger* was certainly no ideal place for a crib.

Such a humble beginning for any king—especially for the King of kings—but it was all according to God’s plan and timing. Luke captured the simplicity of this grand and glorious event with these words: “She gave birth to her firstborn Son.”

To those who were eyewitnesses in the small village of Bethlehem, or even staying in the same place, they probably saw nothing more than a young mother with her first child. Any birth is a wondrous event in itself, yet the majesty and glory of this particular birth was masked by the “ordinariness” of it all. Jesus came to be among us, so it is fitting that the moment of His birth was, in a sense, like any other birth.

But the “ordinary” nature of Jesus’ arrival was about to be overshadowed by a heavenly announcement. This was no ordinary birth!

When has God used outside circumstances to get you where He wanted you to be?

QUESTION #3

PEACE AND JOY

Consider the level at which you are currently experiencing peace and joy. After circling the appropriate level based on how you feel, describe how that differs from what you know to be true.

How am I experiencing peace?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Regardless of how I feel, the reality is

How am I experiencing joy?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Regardless of how I feel, the reality is

Write a prayer to God asking Him to help your feelings align with the reality of what Jesus has done through salvation.

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit!"

— ROMANS 15:13

Luke 2:8-14

⁸ In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: ¹¹ Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³ Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: ¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!

In verse 8, Luke shifted scenes from the baby lying in a manger to shepherds who “were staying out in the fields.” Bethlehem was home to many shepherds who tended to the sheep used in the temple sacrifices in Jerusalem, about six miles away.

When “an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them,” the shepherds were understandably “terrified.” Zechariah had been “terrified and overcome with fear” (1:12) and Mary “was deeply troubled” (v. 29) when the angel Gabriel appeared to them. And just as Gabriel had told Zechariah and Mary, this unnamed angel now told the shepherds, “Don’t be afraid.”

No doubt, the appearance of God’s holy messenger could trigger a healthy dose of awe and fear, but as mighty and awe-inspiring as an angel could be, he came with news that would banish their fears.



What’s so good about the news the angels delivered?

QUESTION #4

In this case, fear would be replaced with joy. “Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” The source of this joy was the birth of Jesus, whom the angel described using several important terms.

- ▶ **A Savior.** The name *Jesus* is tied to the name *Joshua*, which means God is Salvation. It is a most fitting name, because our salvation is the very reason God came to earth.
- ▶ **The Messiah.** The Greek word is *Christos*, and we often translate this as “Christ.” It means the Anointed One, the One God chose for the task of our salvation.
- ▶ **The Lord.** *Lord* is the title Luke used most often for Jesus. He is the Master, the Supreme Authority in all things. This baby in the manger was God Himself.

In verse 13, we see the word *suddenly*. Biblical writers often used this word to describe the unexpected nature of God’s acts—especially events that involved life-changing circumstances. A “multitude” of angels—“the heavenly host”—“suddenly” appeared in the fields of Bethlehem. The angelic group was not addressing the shepherds; they were “praising God,” but the shepherds clearly heard their words of praise. And what climactic words they were! “Glory to God in the highest heaven.”

God deserves our praise for sending His Son to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Angels recognize the worth of God’s presence and praise Him for it. Our purpose in life is also to glorify God, and realizing the wonderful salvation of God should deepen our desire to fulfill our purpose of glorifying Him.

The angels also proclaimed, “Peace on earth to people he favors!” God’s peace is that inner sense of wholeness that only God can bring to believing hearts. His perfect peace “surpasses all understanding” (Phil. 4:7), but it is real for all who believe. In this arrangement we receive peace and God gets all the glory. All this happens because God’s favor rests on us.

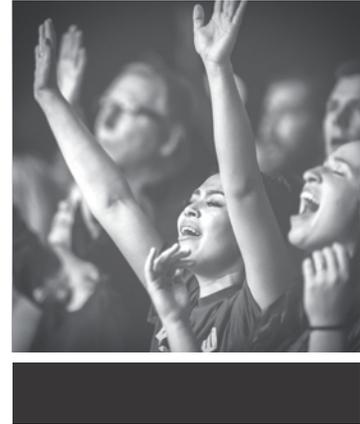
What are some ways our group can bring glory to God and peace to others?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

As you remember God's wonderful gift of salvation, consider the following applications:

- ▶ **Trust.** Reflect on the goodness of God's salvation. If you've never accepted God's offer of salvation, do so now. For more on how to become a Christian, read the inside front cover of this book.
- ▶ **Worship.** As the angels gave glory and highest honor to God, we likewise should aim to give all praise to God in our daily lives. Ask the Lord for a fresh zeal to live a life that glorifies Him in all things.
- ▶ **Pray.** Pray for someone you know who needs to be saved. Consider how his or her life would be changed by the good news, and how God would be glorified. Ask God to begin softening that person's heart to the message of Christ. Pray that God would open a door for you to share your faith.



As Jesus came on a great journey for us, we are to be on mission with Him. And that mission includes helping others find salvation also!

My thoughts

1. Arlene Eisenberg, Heidi E. Murkoff, and Sandee E. Hathaway, *What to Expect When You're Expecting* (New York: Workman Publishing, 2008).