

Jesus' Early Life

The Old Testament ended during the times of Nehemiah and Malachi when the Israelites had returned from their captivity in Babylon. During the 400 years between the Old and New Testaments, the Greeks were conquered by the Romans and the Caesars now ruled. The Jews had split into groups; two of them were Pharisees and Sadducees. Some of the Jews were looking for a savior to deliver them from the Roman rule. At this time, God sent His son to deliver both Jews and Gentiles from the power of sin.

Our aim in this lesson is to watch Jesus being prepared for his great work and to see how we can prepare to serve God even during the days of our youth.

The Angel Speaks to Mary

In the town of Nazareth lived a young woman named Mary, who was a descendant of King David. She had promised to marry a godly man named Joseph. God sent His angel Gabriel to tell Mary that she had been chosen to be the mother of His child, who would become the savior of the world. In humility, she listened to the wonderful message:

“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” Luke 1:31-33

Mary learned that her cousin, Elizabeth was going to have a child too! The baby to be born to Mary was “the son of God”. Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth, took Mary to be his wife and they shared between them the privilege of caring for and bringing up Jesus, who was born by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Birth of Jesus



The prophet Micah wrote that the birth place of Jesus would be Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), but Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth. Yet God's word never fails and this time it was fulfilled in a wonderful way. Judea was under the rule of the Romans and a decree came from the Emperor ordering all his subjects to go to the city where they were born so they could be counted and pay a tax. Mary and Joseph were descendants of David and they had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem. This was a little less than 60 miles, but it was also about 3,000 feet above sea level! The journey was long and

hard for Mary because her baby was ready to be born.

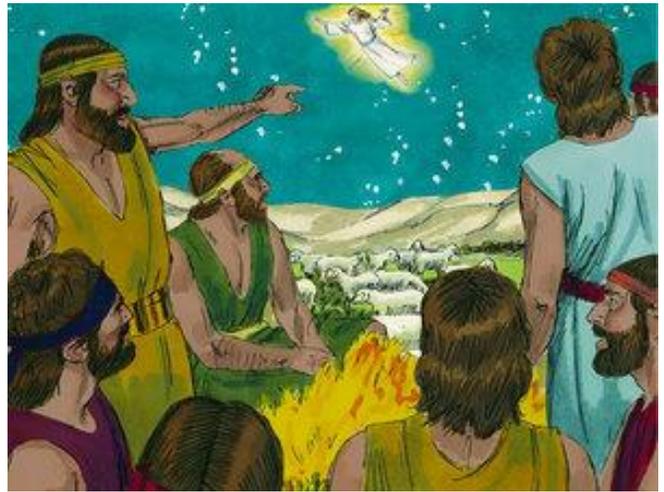
When they finally arrived in Bethlehem, the only place that Joseph could find to stay was an animal stable. This was where baby Jesus was born. Tenderly, his mother wrapped him up and placed him in a manger (this was one of the boxes where the food for the animals was put). From this humble

beginning, in Bethlehem, where God had anointed David to be King of Israel, David's greater Son was born. His name "*Jesus*" means "*Yahweh will save*".

The Shepherds of Jerusalem

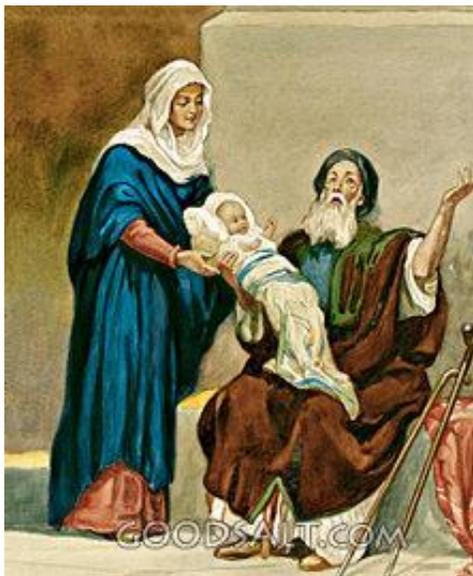
In the fields near Bethlehem, shepherds were guarding their flocks by night. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the heavens were filled with the brightness of the Glory of God, and they became afraid. The angel comforted them:

"Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." Luke 2:10-12



The shepherds listened in amazement. Suddenly there appeared a multitude of angels who sang: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!*" The shepherds were excited and left their sheep to go to Bethlehem to find the baby. They found him just as the angel had said and gave praise to God.

The Baby Jesus Taken to the Temple



According to the Law of Moses, every baby boy had to be circumcised eight days after he was born, and then presented before God at the temple 33 days later. On the 40th day, Mary went with Joseph to Jerusalem to make her offering for her firstborn son. While in the temple God's Spirit guided an old man named Simeon to find baby Jesus and pick him up. God had promised Simeon years ago that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. With reverence Simeon was moved to say:

"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." Luke 2:29-32

At the same time, an old prophetess named Anna, came into the temple and after hearing Simeon, "*she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.*"

The Wise Men from the East

Mary and Joseph returned to Bethlehem where they lived for some time. Far away, in the land to the East, wise men looked for a sign which would tell of the birth of Messiah. When a new star appeared in the heavens, they knew the time had come. Great preparations were made for their long journey to Israel. Gifts were packed and they set out for Jerusalem. They arrived excitedly at the city and began asking “*Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.*” News of this reached the wicked King Herod, who first called to him the chief priests and scribes and demanded that they tell him where Christ should be born! Then he called the wise men to come and talk to him.

Herod was sneaky! He told the wise men to let him know when they found the new young king so that he could come and worship Jesus too. But Herod didn't really want to worship Jesus, he wanted to kill him! He was jealous of the attention that Jesus was getting and afraid that Jesus would one day take his power.

When the wise men were outside, the special star suddenly appeared again and led them to Jesus. They worshipped the young boy Jesus and offered him their precious gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. When the wise men were ready to leave, God warned them not to go back to Herod, so they returned home a different way.



Fleeing to Egypt



An angel then appeared to Joseph and warned him to move to Egypt with Mary and Jesus until it would be safe to return. As time passed, Herod found out that the wise men had found Jesus, but did not return to tell him where Jesus was staying. Herod became furious and afraid. He issued an evil decree that all the children in Bethlehem under two years old must be killed! Thanks to God's loving care, Jesus was already living far away in Egypt out of the reach of King Herod. Joseph and Mary continued living in Egypt for a number of years until they were told that King Herod had died.

Return to Nazareth

Once Herod was dead, they returned to Israel and lived in Nazareth, where Jesus spent most of his mortal life. Nazareth was close to several main trade routes, and was situated in a high valley. It was here that Jesus learned to be a carpenter like Joseph. Mary and Joseph had many children so Jesus would have had half-brothers and half-sisters in his family. As time went on, the Bible says: “*Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*” Jesus grew up like most other Jewish boys, learning to help in his home, for he was the oldest son in a fairly large family.

God taught Jesus many things about the Law of Moses, the Psalms and the prophets, so that as a young boy he understood more about the Bible than any adults! When he was 12 years old he went with his family to Jerusalem to keep the Passover Feast. The Passover was kept every year to remember how God had delivered the Jews from slavery in Egypt.



To 12-year old Jesus this was an exciting event! There were many animal sacrifices offered. He watched the priests perform their duties, listened to the singing of the Psalms, and heard the discussions between the people who had gathered to keep the Passover. Jesus was especially interested in anything he could hear about God and he thought about everything he saw and heard.

After a short stay in Jerusalem, Mary and Joseph and thousands of other people left the city and headed home. Mary assumed that Jesus was somewhere in the crowd of people heading for Nazareth. After walking for a day, she found out that Jesus was nowhere in the traveling group. Joseph and Mary hurried back to Jerusalem to find Jesus. On the third day they found him in the temple, sitting among the old teachers, both listening and asking questions! Joseph and Mary looked at the situation with amazement. They knew he was God's special son, but they had not expected this.

Gently, Jesus tried to explain that he already understood about the great work that he must accomplish as God's son. He said to Mary and Joseph: *"Why did you seek me? Did you not know that I would be in my Father's house?"* Jesus knew why he had been born of God and he continued to prepare himself to fulfill that purpose. Jesus then returned to Nazareth with Joseph and Mary, and he *"was subject to them"*.

Lesson For Us

Consider 12-year old Jesus as he took a journey to Jerusalem with Mary and Joseph and their friends. He was a young boy learning obedience, not only to God, but also to Joseph and Mary. He would have helped out around the house doing jobs and also spent time playing with his younger family members. He worked with his hands as a carpenter and he listened carefully to daily lessons from God's word.

Both Mary and Joseph knew that God was his Father, and that he was being prepared for the work ahead in his life. About 18 years from this time, Jesus left home to begin the major work his Father had prepared for him. We are not called upon to do the exact same work that Jesus did, but in following his example, we should remember how important it is to spend time every day reading God's word, talking to God in prayer, and fulfilling our responsibilities to our parents in our homes.