

LEADER'S GUIDE

Discussion Questions: The Birth of Jesus Christ

Prologue: The bible study of "The Birth of Jesus Christ" is different from other studies. The two gospels that described Jesus' birth were Matthew and Luke. There is little comparison between the two Gospels. This study provides a complete illustration of Jesus' birth by complimenting the two Gospels, who wrote about the event from their point of view. You will notice Matthew is describing the event through Joseph's perspective.

In contrast, Luke's version focuses more closely on Mary's experience. Even though their perspectives of the event are different, this is not to discount either writer's accounts. Quite the contrary, it provides a more complete and detailed interpretation of the event. Matthew was Jewish, and he wrote to the Jewish community. Luke was a Gentile and a physician who never met Jesus. Luke wrote what he knew and heard from the other gospel writers. It is also safe to assume neither Matthew nor Luke were actual eyewitnesses of Jesus' birth. It is also not known how either obtained the knowledge of the events. There is one likely possibility from Matthew's perspective. Matthew is the only one who wrote about Joseph, Jesus' parental father, dreams he had with angels. Matthew probably heard the story from Joseph directly. Luke does not describe any of the dreams. Their descriptions of the event are so different but they both agree that Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth and Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

We spent a great deal of time and care creating the most likely chronological order of events based on the scriptures available. During the study, rotate the reading of the verses with each student giving everyone an opportunity to read the scriptures.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST

- 1) **Test your current knowledge:** Joseph has four dreams before and after Jesus is born. They are all in the book of Matthew, chapters 1 & 2. In what verses are they described? (It is not expected you know all of them yet)
 - a) Joseph's first dream: Matthew 1:19-25
 - b) Joseph's second dream: Matthew 2:13
 - c) Joseph's third dream: Matthew 2:19-20
 - d) Joseph's fourth dream: Matthew 2:22-23
- 2) **The Angel Appears to Joseph:** (Read the verses outlined in red: Matthew 1:18-25)
 - a) In verse Matthew 1:19, what does it mean when Joseph wanted to "put her away secretly?" and why would he do that? Joseph is referred to here as "her husband," however, Joseph and Mary were not yet married but betrothed. A couple of versions use the word "fiancé." Joseph is also referred to as a "just man." Several versions refer to Joseph as a man of compassion, kindness, merciful, and righteousness. But it also means he

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was committed and passionate to his wife and did not want her to undergo any embarrassment of a public divorce but a private divorce.

- 3) **Joseph's First Dream (Matthew 1:20-21):** In Joseph's first dream, what five things did the angel of the Lord inform or command Joseph he must do?
- a) Take Mary as your wife
 - b) The baby conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit
 - c) Mary will give birth to a Son.
 - d) You will call His name Jesus.
 - e) Jesus will save His people from their sins.
- 4) **The First Prophecy Fulfilled:** In Joseph's first dream, who was the prophet and verse, Matthew is referring to in Matthew 1:22-23? And how is the prophecy fulfilled? Isaiah proclaims the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14. (1) The woman must be a virgin. (2) The virgin woman must conceive and become pregnant. (3) She must also give birth to a boy. (4) They must call him Immanuel.

(1) The angel of the Lord first reveals to Joseph in Matthew 1:20-21 that his betrothed wife, Mary, was not unfaithful to him, and she was not pregnant from another man. Therefore, Mary was still a 'virgin.' This fulfills element #1. (2) The angel then explains to Joseph Mary's pregnancy. The angel states Mary's pregnancy was conceived by the Holy Spirit. This act was to fulfill element #2. (3) For purposes of fulfilling the prophecy, in Luke 2:7, Mary brings forth her firstborn Son. This completes element #3. (4) Matthew provides an account of the miraculous conception of Jesus. He details how Mary became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, since Holy Spirit and God are the same, God is Jesus' Father. Matthew describes Jesus as divine as well as being a human being. The appropriate name of Jesus is Immanuel, translated "God is with us." This fulfills element #4.

- 5) **The Birth of Jesus Christ:** (Read the verses outlined in blue: Luke 2:1-7). In Luke 2:3-4, why did Joseph have to return to Bethlehem? Each citizen of the Roman empire was required to go to the town of their ancestral roots. In Joseph's case, he would have to go to Bethlehem, also known as the City of David, because it was the place of his birth. Also, Joseph descended from David as his ancestor. The distance from Nazareth to Bethlehem is about 70 miles.
- 6) **The Second Prophecy is Fulfilled:** Referring to the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, who and what verse is Matthew 2:5-6 and Luke 2:4-6 referring to? How is the prophecy fulfilled? The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem also fulfills a

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prophecy from Messiah (Micah 5:2). To fulfill this prophecy, three elements need to be achieved.

1. The Messiah must be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah
2. The Messiah come from God to be ruler of Israel
3. The Messiah be from old and be everlasting.

1. The birthplace of the future ruler of Israel must be from Bethlehem, Ephrathah. At the time of Micah's writing, there were two towns named Bethlehem. One is in Judah near Jerusalem. The other is north near Nazareth. Micah specifically states the town of Bethlehem in Ephrathah. The Bethlehem of Ephrathah narrows the location to the Judah area. Ephrathah is more specific, similar to naming the county rather than the state. Matthew 2:1, fulfills element #1. 2. "out of you shall come forth to Me." Out of Bethlehem Jesus will come forth. The coming ruler would come from Bethlehem. He would come from the old days and be eternal. Habakkuk mentions this in Habakkuk 1:12. Jesus claims to be the Messiah, ruler of Israel, John 4:25-26. Mark 14:61-62. This fulfills element #2. 3. John reaffirms Jesus is eternal. John 1:1-2. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." Isaiah 9:6 defines the Jesus as being everlasting, as being called the "Everlasting Father." This fulfills element #3.

Prophecy fulfilled. Only Jesus Christ fits this prophecy. (1) He was born in Bethlehem, (2) Jesus claimed to be the Messiah to rule over Israel, and (3) He fits the descriptions as being from "ancient times" and is everlasting. No other person or ruler in Israel fits these requirements.

- 7) In Luke 2:7 Luke states Jesus was her first born. What other siblings did Jesus have from Mary? Two verses confirm this: Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3. Both state Jesus had at least four brothers: James, Joses, Simon, and Judas.
- 8) What word(s) or indications refer that Jesus was born in a stable? Luke 2:7 "laid Him in a manger."
- 9) **The ANGEL appears to the Shepherds.** Read the verses outlined in green: Luke 2:8-20
 - a) Who did the shepherds hear for the first time of the birth of Christ the Lord? The shepherds heard from an angel.
 - b) What did they do after they heard it? They left for Bethlehem at that moment.

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- c) What did they need to do to confirm what they heard? They found Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus in the manger, exactly as depicted by the angels. The angel clearly states the child would be wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. The left immediately to see evidence for themselves. They told everyone they came in contact with what they heard and saw. In essence, these shepherds were the first to preachers of the gospel.
- 10) **The Circumcision of Jesus:** (Read the verses outlined in orange: Luke 2:21), if Jesus was born without sin, why did He still need to be circumcised? It was a typical Jewish tradition that baby boys were to be circumcised on the eighth day. Jesus was no different. Even though Jesus had no sin, it was proper for Jesus to be circumcised. He would also not be admitted to any synagogue or Jewish temple and finish His work if not circumcised.
- 11) **Jesus Presented in the Temple – The Purification:** (Read the verses outlined in black: Luke 2:22-24). In order for Mary to complete her purification, what must she bring to the temple? Where is this written in the Old Testament? Verse 2:23 refers to Exodus 13:2. If the mother could not afford a lamb, a pigeon, or a dove as the burnt sacrificial offering, she would be required to provide them. If she could not afford it, she would be allowed to bring a pigeon and two doves. Since she brought the pigeon and two doves, we would have to conclude that Joseph and Mary were living a life in poverty. (Leviticus 12:8)
- 12) **Simeon Sees God's Salvation – Simeon's Prophecy is Fulfilled:** (Read the verses outlined in gray: Luke 2:25-35). Simeon fulfills the third prophecy in Luke. How does the prophecy get fulfilled? The Holy Spirit gave Simeon unique insight to see Christ before his passing in life. To be guaranteed, Simeon would see Christ before he passed on from this life. In verse 28, Simeon sees baby Jesus in this very moment, and the prophecy is fulfilled.
- 13) **Simeon declares four prophecies for Jesus and his mother Mary.** What are they?
1. Jesus is responsible for the rise and fall of many people living in Israel.
 2. Jesus is destined for a sign which will be spoken against.
 3. The sword will pierce Mary's soul.
 4. The hearts of many will be revealed.
- 14) **The Second Witness to the Redeemer:** (Read the verses outlined in light blue: Luke 2:36-38). Who else bears witness to the Redeemer? And why does there need to be two witnesses? The prophetess Anna of Asher. The Old Covenant Law requires two witnesses to establish legal evidence the event indeed took place. Simeon and Anna are the two witnesses of Jesus' purification. Deuteronomy 17:6 or 19:15.

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- 15) **The Magi's Visit from the East:** (Read the verses outlined in purple: Matthew 2:1-12). In Matthew 2:1-2,
- Why did the wise men that come from the East?
 - What were they seeking? They saw a star in the East to signify the new King of the Jews and wanted to give homage to the new King.
- 16) In Matthew 2:3-6, Herod gathered all the chief priests and scribes to help him find out where the Christ was to be born. Who was the prophet and where is it written in the Old Testament where the Messiah would be born? The chief priests and scribes knew the scriptures well enough to know Bethlehem was identified as the Messiah's birthplace. This prophecy can be found in the Old Testament in Micah 5:2.
- 17) In Matthew 2:7-8, what was Herod's plan of deception? Herod uses the wise men to obtain the location of the young Child. He sends the wise men to Bethlehem with the appearance disguised as religion so he may worship Him as well. He hopes to do this not to raise suspicion of his actual plan to kill the Child. Notice, this is where the description of Christ changes from "baby" to "young Child."
- 18) In Matthew 2:11, What gifts did the wise men present to Jesus? The three gifts presented to Jesus were, gold, frankincense, and myrrh, This may have brought about the legend that there were three wise men, each carrying one of the gifts.
- 19) Why did the Magi return to their homeland in a different route? The Magi have their own dream. Now that the wise men fulfilled their quest, they were ready to return to King Herod per his request and notify him of the location of baby Jesus. It does not state if one or all the Magi were warned in a dream. All that is known is the dream was convincing enough to cause them to not return to King Herod.
- 20) **Joseph's Second Dream:** (Read the verses outlined in yellow: Matthew 2:13-15). In Matthew 2:13, Joseph's second dream, why does Joseph "Arise" and take Mary and Jesus and leave Bethlehem. And where do they go? An angel appears to Joseph in a second dream who tells him to take the young Child and his mother to Egypt. There to wait there until called upon because king Herod will seek out the Child and kill him.
- 21) **Third Prophecy Might be Fulfilled:** In Matthew 2:14-15, what is the third prophecy and how might it be fulfilled? The prophecy comes from Hosea 11:1 and is referenced herein verse 2:15, and the words "might be" fulfilled is what has most scholars baffled. Matthew is referring here to Hosea 11:1, where Hosea states, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." In Hosea's context, God, if referring to Israel as a young nation, similar to a father, would look upon his young son. The leap of faith is where Matthew refers to Jesus as the actual Son of God being called out of Egypt.

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- 22) **The Massacre of the Innocents:** (Read the verses outlined in light green: Matthew 2:16-18). What is the Massacre of the Innocents? Herod felt deceived when the Magi did not return as Herod had expected. In turn, he was extremely angry. His plan of sending an executioner to kill Jesus had failed. He decided to still accomplish his goal by killing all the male children under the age of two years old in Bethlehem and surrounding settlements. Bethlehem was a small village numbering only a couple of thousand people. This would calculate to about 20-30 boys under the age of 2 years old.
- 23) **Fourth Prophecy Fulfilled:** Where is the verse Jeremiah refers to and what is its significance to the children being massacred? Matthew refers to the prophet Jeremiah in verse Jeremiah 31:15. The story Jeremiah tells is Rachel is a representation of mothers of Israel weeping as Israel's children are taken away in Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C. This is very similar to what the mothers were doing after the Bethlehem massacre. The mothers of Bethlehem were weeping with great mourning.
- 24) **Joseph's Third Dream – The Return to Nazareth:** (Read the verses outlined in dark red: Matthew 2:19-21). What is Joseph's Third Dream in Matthew 2:19-21? Herod died in 4 B.C. in Israel. The angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream for the third time. The angel tells Joseph to take his family and return to Israel. The angel also informs Joseph those who wish to kill Jesus are dead. Notice this is plural. This could refer to Herod alone. But it could also include Herod's son, Antipater. Herod had Antipater put to death five days before his own death. It is now safe to return to Judea.
- 25) **Joseph's Fourth Dream – Fifth Prophecy Might be Fulfilled:** Read verses outlined in dark blue Matthew 2:22-23 and Luke 2:39-40). In the fifth prophecy, if Herod was dead, why was Joseph afraid to go to Judea and reside in Bethlehem? Is there a prophet that refers to this prophecy? Joseph is once again warned of danger by a dream, so he diverted his family and moved north to the region of Galilee in the specific town called Nazareth. Matthew refers to a prophecy that might be fulfilled where Jesus will be called a Nazarene. There is no known biblical prophecy that says the Messiah would come from Nazareth. There are, however, many prophecies Jesus may fit this scenario. (1) There are prophecies where Jesus will be despised and considered as lower class (Psalm 22:6; Isaiah 49:7; and Isaiah 53:3). (2) Another example scholars have referred to is Isaiah 11:1, where the descended of Jesse is called "a branch." Because the term for "branch" in Hebrew is "neser," which implies something common or low, Nazareth was not a big town. It also had a low reputation in Israel. It was considered lower-class to the more distinguished Jews. Another important point, Matthew does not say that this was spoken by the prophet; he actually states, "by the prophets." That may be why several prophets could be cited for this.