

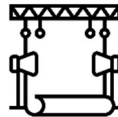
Bible Study

The Birth of Jesus



How to use this Bible Study

Welcome to this Bible study. It will be a blessing to you. The study consists of background thoughts, scripture references and questions. There are no wrong or right answers to the questions and the scripture references are given as a help. Some of the questions are formulated so that we can list the answer to the questions. The reason for this is to help us to remember some key facts about a particular verse, and to help us to focus on key aspects of that verse. This Bible Study can be completed individually, or you may wish to invite some friends or family members to do it with you. All scripture references are from the new King James version.



Backdrop

The focus of this Bible study is the carefully planned and fulfilled events in the life of Jesus, his parents, relatives and significant others through whom God announces His divine plans and purposes for His Son in the months before, and immediately after His birth. This is not a Bible Study about Christmas, although Christmas would be a good time to do the study. The Birth of Jesus was only one of the very significant events that happened at that time. There is so much more to Jesus being born in a stable, and the aim of this study is to delve deeper especially into those events and what they mean, even to this day. So, let's get started!



1. The Angel Gabriel's Visit to Zachariah

Early in the book of Luke we encountered Zachariah, one of the High Priests who performed temple duties in Jerusalem. He was a righteous man and so was his wife, Elizabeth. They had no children as Elizabeth was barren. But that was about to change after an Angel of God visited Zachariah while he was busy burning incense at the Altar of Incense inside the Temple. Once Zachariah had settled down after realising it was an angel standing at the right side of the altar, Gabriel told him that his wife would soon bear a son. Zachariah initially did not believe the angel sent by God despite his prayers to God to have a child! As a result of his unbelief, he became mute! Upon leaving the Temple he quickly had to change to sign language and one can imagine the confusion amongst those outside wanting to know from him what took him so long! Nevertheless, he was much pleased with the news as he left the temple shaken but with a smile on his face!

Scripture for Study

Luke 1: 13 -17

¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zachariah, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵ For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. ¹⁶ And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." ¹⁸ And Zachariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." ¹⁹ And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. ²⁰ But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."

Questions for Reflection

a. What will be so extraordinary about Zachariah's son?

He will be _____ in the sight of the Lord

He will be filled with the _____, even from his mothers _____

He will _____ many of the children of Israel to the _____

He will go before _____ in the spirit and power of _____

He will turn the hearts of the _____ to the _____

He will turn the _____ to the _____ of the just

b. Why do you think it was necessary to prepare Israel for the coming of the Lord Jesus?

c. What do you think the Angel meant by the "turning of the disobedient to the wisdom of the Just"?

d. Why do you think it was so difficult for Zachariah to believe the angel's message?

e. How did the angel explain his position of authority to Zachariah?

f. How would you put the angel's response to Zachariah in your own words?

Scripture for Further Reading

Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:1-3; Mark 1: 2 – 8; John 1:23

Afterthought

Gabriel responded to Zachariah's unbelief in no uncertain terms! Zachariah was indeed speechless, but nevertheless so overwhelmed that the God of Israel was going to answer his prayer. And so was Elizabeth, with whom he shared the news, and for whom it was a disgrace to be barren. That was all about to change. But there is so much more significance to this birth and the full measure of it only came to light as John grew up and started his ministry. The Jews were expecting a Messiah and John the Baptist, as he became known, prepared the way for Jesus as he revealed a different side to the Messiah than the one the Jews were expecting. Not everyone was in favour of hearing the message, never mind hearing it from a dusty preacher wearing clothes made from the skin of a camel! His ministry warrants another Bible study, but for now let us return to the life of Jesus's parents.



2. The Angel Gabriel's Visit to Mary

It was not long after the angel Gabriel's visit to Zachariah that he was sent on another mission. It was not that much different as it required only a slight deviation in course. He needed to deliver a similar message to an engaged couple resident in a town north of Jerusalem. It was probably his most special mission to date. This time he appeared to the women in her house and was met with a similar response of bewilderment. But true to his virtue he once again brought calm to the situation as he delivered his message. The recipient of his message this time responded by believing.

Scripture for Study

Luke 1:26 - 35

²⁶ Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" ²⁹ But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. ³⁰ Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. ³² 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. ³³ And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" ³⁵ And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.

Questions for Reflection

a. What did the angel reveal about Mary?

b. Why do you think was Mary so troubled about the visit of the angel?

c. What was the angel's response to her?

d. What will be the position and purpose of Jesus according to the angel?

He will be _____ and will be called the _____ of the Highest

The Lord God will give Him the throne of _____

He will reign over the house of _____ forever and of His kingdom there will be no _____

e. Why do you think was it necessary for Gabriel to instruct Mary what to name the child?

Afterthought

Mary believed the message brought by the angel but her main concern was how all of this is going to happen seeing that she is not married and not intimate with any man. How would she explain it to Joseph? The angel comforted her and left her with the promise of the presence of the Holy Spirit that will come over her, and the power of the Highest that will overshadow her like a cloud. It will not be necessary for her to be intimate with a man. The Holy One that will henceforth be born, will therefore be called the Son of God, as he will come from God. To Mary it made perfect sense, it was to be an honour for her, and she immediately offered herself as a servant to the Highest. The angel left Mary knowing that it was not necessary this time to convince anyone about the origins of his mission. The full consequences of the message brought by the angel nevertheless still had to dawn on Mary.



3. An Angel Visits Joseph

After learning that Mary was pregnant Joseph was understandably disturbed as he would have had great difficulty explaining the circumstances to anyone, knowing that he was a righteous man. Mary's explanation may have made sense to him but to others it would have not made sense. The only way that he could spare them the embarrassment was for him to separate from Mary, and for them to go into hiding. But while asleep an unknown angel visited Joseph in a dream that brought an end to his sleepless nights. He awoke an exited different man!

Scripture for Study

Matthew 1:20 - 23

²⁰ But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins. ²² So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us".

Questions for Reflection

a. What did the angel tell Joseph to do?

b. What will be the purpose of Jesus according to the angel?

for He will _____ His people from their _____

c. Why do you think was the message by the angel to Joseph much less detailed than the message brought to Mary by Gabriel.

Scripture for Further Reading

Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:20 -25

Afterthought

Gabriel and the unknown angel made sure that both Joseph and Mary knew that it was not their privilege to name the child. There should not be any doubt in their minds about what His name must be. It spared them going through the lists of family names! The appearance by the angel to Joseph was brief and to the point as he confirmed the prophecy brought by Isaiah, making sure that there is no doubt in the mind of Joseph about what is going to happen. The prophecy about Jesus spoken by Isaiah was almost out of context at the time and would have raised many thick eyebrows. But it came to fulfillment at a God ordained time as Joseph became the bearer of the good news about a Child that will save the whole world, and who will grow up on a very healthy diet of curd and honey! What a privilege for a father!



4. Mary Visits Elizabeth

Not long after the angels' visits to Joseph and Mary, while still in Nazareth, Mary was prompted to visit Elizabeth knowing that she according to Gabriel, was also expecting a baby. Seeing that they were relatives it brought great excitement to them. It was a dangerous and strenuous 100-mile journey south to the city of Judah on the outskirts of

Jerusalem, but it was a journey to look forward to. It was not the normal coming together of relatives. It held the promise of a powerful and supernatural encounter that would bless both of them, and their children for ever.

Scripture for Study

Luke 1:39-45

³⁹ Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰ and entered the house of Zachariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord."

Questions for Reflection

a. Why do you think the baby "leaped for joy" in Elizabeth's womb when he heard Mary's voice?

b. Suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit how did Elizabeth's tone of voice change?

c. What were the blessings Elizabeth spoke over Mary?

Blessed *are* you among _____ and blessed *is* _____ of your womb!

Blessed *is* she who _____, for there will be a _____ which was told her from the Lord.

d. Why do you think Elizabeth felt unworthy of Mary's visit?

e. When do you think Elizabeth realised that Mary was to be the mother of her Lord?

Scripture for Further Reading

Luke 2:46-56

Afterthought

Both women were filled with exuberant joy, and Elizabeth with gratitude to be able to be with the mother of her Lord, and Mary whose spirit rejoiced over the thought that she, a lowly servant will forever be thanked and praised by future generations. So much so that Mary broke out in a song of praise that ended at the life of their forefather Abraham. But it was not only them who were filled with joy! John, still in his mother's womb could not contain his excitement, so much so that Elizabeth must have steadied herself on several occasions. He too realised already at that stage the significance of everything that was unfolding. Mary stayed on with Elizabeth until the birth of her child, and in anticipation of her own labour, returned home. This time in a far more advanced stage of bearing her own child, most likely with Joseph close by her side.



5. The Birth of Jesus

Not long after Joseph and Mary's return to Nazareth and almost at the time when Mary was due to give birth, Caesar Augustus, on orders from Rome, called for a census of everyone in the Roman Kingdom. The first of its kind as family's were required to register in the towns and cities of their ancestry. Seeing that Joseph came from the lineage of David they had to be registered in the city of David. It meant a return journey to the south past Jerusalem to Bethlehem, the city of David. With Mary in an advanced stage of her pregnancy it was a slow and strenuous journey. Many others were also in town to complete the census seeing that they could not find any room to stay at an inn, once they arrived. They had to settle for something much less comfortable, but it was all part of the heavenly plan!

Scripture for Study

⁶ So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. ⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Questions for Reflection

a. What do you think were the thoughts of Joseph and Mary that night? What do you think they were saying to one another?

Scripture for Further Reading

Matthew 1: 18 – 24; Luke 2: 6 -7

Afterthought

Joseph and Mary settled down with their new-born child in a stable for the night. It was in the middle of winter and surrounded by sheep and maybe donkeys and other animals, it was certainly not the most comfortable and "good smelling". But one can imagine the relief and excitement from being able to birth the Child promised by their Lord, with at least a roof over their heads, and a place for the baby to be laid in. It was an uneasy night of joy and celebration and with visitors round the corner, it promised to be a sleepless night as well.



6. The Shepherd's Visit Jesus

Scripture for Study

Luke 2: 8 - 14

⁸ Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. ¹⁰ Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹ For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

Questions for Reflection

a. What will be the sign to the shepherds that Jesus was born?

b. Can you think about a title to the song the heavenly hosts were singing?

Scripture for Further Reading

Luke 2: 15 - 20

Afterthought

The shepherds were understandably shaken when the angel appeared in front of them. As was the scenario with Zachariah, Mary and Joseph, the angel had to calm the shepherds' nerves. But there was more to come. They witnessed a multitude of heavenly hosts! For a moment a heavenly choir of thousands, maybe millions came down to earth to sing praises

to the King. They were privileged to witness a very rare, if not the only, event where so many angels appeared on earth for such a brief moment! After the curtains were drawn on the spectacle it did not take very long for the shepherds to find the new-born baby. They must have been very eager to see what this was all about. The baby was not only the only baby that was to be found in a manger in the whole of Bethlehem that night, but He was also the Saviour of the world! One can imagine the topic of their discussions around their fires at night for a long time to come.



7. Simeon Dedicates Jesus

Required by the law of Moses, the family had to wait 7 days for the purification of Mary to be completed. On the 8th day they visited the Temple in Jerusalem for Jesus to be dedicated and officially named as it was custom and prescribed in the law. He was to be officially presented to the Lord as the first-born son from the family. But it was not only Joseph and Mary that eagerly anticipated this event. Inspired by the Holy Spirit Simeon, a regular visitor to temple, was awaiting them. He was waiting for this day for a very long time and was ready and prepared by the Holy Spirit for a special dedication.

Scripture for Study

Luke 2: 25 - 32

²⁵ And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, ²⁸ he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: ²⁹ "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; ³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation ³¹ Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, ³² A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel." ³³ And Joseph and His mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of Him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against ³⁵ (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Questions for Reflection

a. What was Simeon waiting for?

b. How did Simeon described the salvation he saw?

A _____ to bring _____ to the Gentiles, And the _____ of Your

people _____.

c. What was the Child destined for?

Behold, this *Child* is destined for the _____ and _____ of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be _____ that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Scripture for Further Reading

Isaiah 60:3; Acts 13:47; Acts 26:23

Afterthought

Simeon was a very relieved man! He patiently waited for this day not only to see the Salvation for Israel and the Gentiles, but also to be able to be the one to pronounce the blessing over this Child. So much so that afterwards he was ready to “depart in peace”. Most likely already in his old age he was ready to peacefully succumb to his earthly existence as his dream came into fulfilment. As Joseph and Mary marvelled at Simeon’s words, he left them with the ominous message that their Son will be a test to many, the source of much resistance and the source of sorrow for them too! Not understanding the full content Joseph and Mary had a lot to think about as they prepared to leave the temple. But there was another person eagerly anticipating this day.



8. Anna Shares the Good News

Scripture for Study

As Anna, an elderly women in her eighties, was entering the temple for her daily visit she immediately recognised Who the Baby was that Joseph and Mary were holding in their arms.

Luke 2:36 - 38

³⁶ Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; ³⁷ and this woman *was* a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served *God* with fastings and prayers night and day. ³⁸ And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

Questions for Reflection

a. How do you think Anna knew that the child was Jesus?

b. What was her response?

c. Who were the people in Jerusalem that looked for redemption?

Questions for Further Study

Deuteronomy 33:24

Afterthought

Anna was a remarkable woman, a prophetess who despite her age visited the temple day and night for times of fasting and prayer. She was from the tribe of Asher, the most favourite tribe whose "feet were dipped in oil" and therefore fitting that a descendant of this tribe would be one of the first witnesses for Jesus. It was her lifelong passion to spend time at the temple and while roaming the streets of Jerusalem most likely be an encourager to those that were awaiting the redemption of their city. Meeting the family in the temple she immediately recognised who the Child was and there and then gave thanks to the Lord that this day had finally arrived! She could not wait another day as she shared the good news with others! One of the first persons if not the first, to go and tell others that the Redeemer of Jerusalem has finally arrived!



Thank you for participating in this Bible Study. Please see the reflections and thoughts about this Bible Study for more insights.



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Updated January 2022