

The Christmas Story

Shalom! I'm Mary, from Nazareth, a small village of about 400 people. We are, what you would call, the working poor – farmers, shepherds and servants working for the rich in nearby towns. Our land is occupied by the Romans and the soldiers treat us with arrogance and cruelty. For hundreds of years we Jewish people had been waiting for the promised Messiah - the one God would send to save us. But still, I was content – I was engaged to Joseph, a carpenter and highly respected man in our village. He began to build a room on his family's home so we would have a place to live when we got married.

Luke 1:26 – 35

One evening as I was sitting in my room, an angel appeared. I was so frightened! Why was he visiting me, Mary, a poor girl in Nazareth. And then he told me that I would become the mother of the Son of God, the Messiah – even though I was a virgin. Impossible, I thought. But he said God's spirit would come upon me. I trembled to think of this amazing thing happening – I couldn't imagine how. But I had to trust this messenger from God. Yet, what did it all mean?

Hymn – Love Came Down at Christmas 242

Luke 1:36-45

The angel Gabriel said that my relative Elizabeth was also expecting a child, even though she was well past child-bearing years. I wanted so badly to see and talk to her, so when I learned that a group of friends were going to Jerusalem, close to where she lived, I jumped at the chance. When I entered her house and saw that she was going to have a child, I knew I really had seen the angel. Then Elizabeth told me she was honored to be visited by the mother of her Lord! How did she know? Then the truth became real to me: God had chosen me, and my heart was lifted up in wonder and joy. I stayed with Elizabeth for three months. Then I had to return home to tell my mother and father and Joseph that I was pregnant. What would they say? How could they possibly believe I was still a virgin and that my child was the Son of God? What was God asking of me? What would they do with me?

Matthew 1:18-25

God in his mercy, sent an angel to Joseph and told him to go ahead and take me as his wife. He told Joseph that my son would be the Savior, and that we should name him Jesus. So Joseph took me to live with his family and he lovingly cared for me. There was one thing I wondered about, though, as I waited. The prophets foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, but we lived in Nazareth.

Luke 2:1-7

The Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, announced that a census would take place. He wanted people counted so he could raise taxes. This meant that Joseph and I would have to travel to Bethlehem. I guess that was God's answer! Traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem is always hard – there are mountains and deserts to cross, and it takes about nine days. And, since my child was ready to be born, it was especially difficult. How relieved I was to see Bethlehem! But when we arrived, every room at the inn was filled. I had expected God to provide a special place for the Messiah to be born – but the only spot for us was a stable. Had God forgotten us? But then Jesus was born. I forgot my disappointment when I looked into my baby's precious face. I held him close, nursed him, and laid him in the only crib I had – a manger, a feeding trough used to feed the animals.

Hymn: O Little Town of Bethlehem (vs. 1,2,3) 230

Luke 2:8-20

Suddenly we heard loud voices outside the stable, and in burst a group of excited shepherds. Full of wonder, they described a grand spectacle they had witnessed while tending their sheep – an angel appeared to them, full of the glory of God. They were terrified until the angel said that the Savior had been born. Their amazement grew when a multitude of angels appeared, singing praises to God. The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem to find out if what the angels said was true. As they looked at Jesus, those ragged shepherds grew calm, and they worshipped him with great joy and reverence. When the shepherds left, they couldn't keep the news to themselves. We could hear them praising God and calling out to people they met that the long-awaited Messiah had been born.

Musical Offering – O Hear the Angel Voices/Angels from the Realms of Glory (1,2) 220

Matthew 2:1-11

Something even more surprising happened later when entourage of men riding camels came to us. They were called Magi, scholars living in a distant eastern land. They told us they had seen a special star that signaled the birth of the king of the Jews. Even though they weren't Jews, they traveled all that distance to pay honor to Jesus. We were amazed to see these men bow down and worship our child, showing their adoration with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh! Even they recognized that our child was a king. Then they went home by another route, because they realized King Herod had lied to them. He wanted to kill this newborn king.

Hymn – The First Noel (vs. 1,3,5) 245

On that first Christmas night long ago, it was likely not a silent night – with the noise of a crowded town, the sounds of a young woman giving birth, the cries of a newborn infant. But it was definitely a holy night. It was a night that would forever change the course of the world. The Messiah, the Savior of the world was born. It was a night in which the true light came into the world and shined in our darkness.

Rebecca: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light

Amy (7pm)/Russ (9pm): For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given!

Rebecca: His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Amy (7pm)/Russ (9pm): Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Rebecca: The Word became flesh and dwells among us!

Amy (7pm)/Russ (9pm): Glory to God in the highest and peace to all God's people on earth.