

**Episode:** Christmas Series No. 1

**Narrator:** Isaiah

**Primary Scriptures:** Isaiah 9:6, 11:1; Micah 5:2; John 1:1-3

**Story Summary:** Prophecies about the baby Jesus

**Location:** Kingdom of Judea (Israel)

**Time:** Circa 750 BC

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1-3

Do you think Adam and Eve were a failed experiment of God? Do you think the Law of Moses and the Tabernacle were just more failed creations of God? What about the Temple built by Solomon, or the second Temple built after the exile of the Jews to Assyria and Babylon? Or the Jewish people themselves? Do you think God gave it his best shot, but these things just didn't work out the way he'd hoped?

If you think that way, then it might follow God conceived of the idea of Jesus a short while before he was born. That Jesus is just one more of God's ideas that he hoped would work out better than some of his others. Few Christians would probably word these conclusions so crudely, but they probably do at least partially represent what many people unknowingly believe.

On the other hand, many Christians believe all of those events and people were part of God's plan that existed before the beginning of time itself; and that God knew before the creation of the world that only Jesus could be the Savior of the World (Revelation 13:8).

One of the most revealing Scriptures in the New Testament is in Luke 24:27. In one of his first appearances after his resurrection, Jesus is talking to two of his disciples. "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."

In other words, the Old Testament is about Jesus, but nobody could see it until Jesus showed them how. The Laws of Moses were about Jesus, but Moses did not know it. The prophets prophesied about Jesus, but they did not know it. The Psalms were about Jesus, but David and the other writers did not know it.

If you listened only to Christmas carols, it would be easy to conclude that Jesus did not exist prior to being born in the Little Town of Bethlehem. But John 1:1-14, along with a lot of other Scriptures, confirm that Jesus existed at the beginning of everything, before coming in the form of a man in Bethlehem.

Although it was hundreds of years before his birth, the prophet Isaiah spoke about the birth of Jesus in the present tense. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given." (Isaiah 9:6)

**Episode:** Christmas Series No. 2

**Narrator:** A Magi

**Primary Scriptures:** Luke 1-2

**Story Summary:** The Magi look for a savior

**Location:** Babylon

**Time:** Circa 5 BC

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** Luke 2:1

The Southern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by Babylon in 597 BC, and the Babylonians immediately began deporting everyone (except the poor people) from Jerusalem to Babylon. Among the deportees was Daniel, a young nobleman.

Through his God-given wisdom and visions, Daniel became the chief of Babylon's wise men and astrologers. For his entire adult life, Daniel served the kings of Babylon and Persia while remaining true to God. His interpretations of visions were always accurate, and many modern Christians believe many of his own visions are prophecies which have not yet been fulfilled.

It seems likely that Daniel would have had a lasting influence on the wise men of Babylon, and may have left them a prophecy regarding a king of the Jews and a special astrological event. Whether their knowledge came from Daniel or not, Magi traveled from the East to King Herod in Jerusalem with only one aim: to find and worship the king of the Jews heralded by a special star.

The Bible is not precise about the time of year when the Magi saw the star, when they started traveling, or when they arrived. However, based on King Herod's later response of killing all of the baby boys in Bethlehem under the age of two, it is often assumed that the Magi arrived within two years after the birth of Jesus, and may have even arrived immediately after his birth.

The Bible does not say how many Magi came to worship Jesus, nor how many camels they brought. However, the Bible does specify that they brought three special gifts for Jesus, so many have assumed there were three Magi who came.

The three gifts of the Magi were gold, frankincense, and myrrh. It has often been observed that gold was gift fit for a king, as they were coming to worship a king. Frankincense was a valuable gift often used in the worship of deities and gods, while myrrh was a resin extracted from special thorn trees that was, among other things, used in burials. All three gifts acted as prophetic symbols about Jesus, the Son of God, who would be king of the Jews, worthy of worship, and who would die for the sins of all mankind.

**Episode:** Christmas Series No. 3

**Narrator:** Elizabeth

**Primary Scriptures:** Luke 1

**Story Summary:** Elizabeth miraculously has a child

**Location:** Judea

**Time:** Circa 5 BC

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** Luke 1:5-7

There were at least three prophecies concerning John the Baptist in the Old Testament. About seven centuries before his birth, the prophet Isaiah wrote about a voice crying in the wilderness to prepare the way for the Lord (Isaiah 40:3-5). We know this prophecy was specifically about John the Baptist because Matthew confirmed it in Matthew 3:1-3, while John confirmed it about himself, recorded in John 1:20-23.

About four centuries before John's birth, the prophet Malachi also wrote about him. In Malachi 3:1, he wrote that a messenger would prepare the way for the Lord. We know that prophecy was specifically about John the Baptist because Jesus said so in Matthew 11:7-10.

Malachi also wrote that Elijah the prophet would be sent before the great and dreadful day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5). We can determine he was metaphorically speaking of John the Baptist because of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 11:13-14. Luke also alludes to this in Luke 1:17.

The details of the birth of John the Baptist are given in Luke 1, information so specific that it seems likely to have come from a participant in the story. Perhaps Elizabeth or Mary gave Luke the information he needed to write this chapter! In Luke 1:2, Luke stated that he talked to eyewitnesses before writing his account.

Luke makes it clear that the conception of John the Baptist was a miracle provided by the Lord. John's mother, far past child-bearing age, was unable to conceive until the Lord allowed it to happen. When God declared she would become pregnant, it happened immediately. Elizabeth specifically said that the Lord had caused it to happen (Luke 1:25).

Elizabeth and Zechariah were not chosen randomly—she was a relative of Mary, who was soon to become the mother of Jesus. Soon after Mary became pregnant by the Holy Spirit, she visited Elizabeth who was pregnant with John, and from that moment on, the miracle babies would be linked together for all time.

Luke describes how Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed that Mary's child was to be her Lord. In this proclamation, she intimated that Jesus would not only be her Lord, but he would be the Lord of the world.

**Episode:** Christmas Series No. 4

**Narrator:** Mary's mother

**Primary Scriptures:** Luke 1:26-28, 1:31-38, 1:41-45, 1:56-66, 1:79-85

**Story Summary:** Mary's mother is excited for her to marry Joseph

**Location:** Nazareth

**Time:** Circa 5 BC

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** Luke 1:26

The Bible does not say how old Mary was when she got betrothed to Joseph or when she got pregnant with Jesus. The Bible does not tell anything about Mary's parents or how they raised her. This episode was created by considering the customs and conditions that existed in Nazareth during this time period.

At the time of Jesus's birth, Nazareth was a small village in the middle of nowhere—it wasn't even mentioned in the Old Testament. Matthew 2:23 records that the prophets said Jesus would be called a Nazarene, but we have no record of those prophecies. When Jesus started recruiting his followers, Nathaniel said, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"

At the time of Jesus' birth, the nearby town of Sepphoris was not yet important, and the city of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee had not been built. Nazareth was perched on a hillside overlooking the important trade route running through the productive Jezreel Valley, but Nazareth was separate from them.

At the time of Mary's pregnancy, Nazareth likely had a population of a few hundred, and probably had public water source which would have been used for civic and religious purposes. All of the residents would have been Jewish. Very likely the Nazarenes would have had close ties with those in nearby villages, such as Cana.

During that time, having children was of utmost importance. Marriages determined family lines, solidified family ties, and aided in establishing economic prosperity. Parents of males would be focused on making sure their sons were able to provide economically for their families, and parents of females would be focused on making sure their daughters were virgins and would be good mothers. In modern times, that all sounds antiquated, but there was an additional important reason for all that.

Inheritance and religious factors made it imperative to know whether a first-born son actually belonged to the father, and the only way that could be assured was for the wife to be a virgin at the time of marriage, and for her to remain faithful until the first pregnancy. It was impossible for parents to be too overprotective of their daughters' sexual purity and reputations.

Against that backdrop, try to imagine how Mary's parents must have felt and reacted when she announced her pregnancy.

**Episode:** Christmas Series No. 5

**Narrator:** Mary

**Primary Scriptures:** Luke 1:26-56

**Story Summary:** Mary tells of the events surrounding her pregnancy

**Location:** Nazareth

**Time:** Circa 4 BC

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** Luke 1:46-50

The Bible does not say how old Mary was when she became pregnant with Jesus. Based on customs at that time, it is likely that she was between thirteen and sixteen years old. For her entire life, her physical and sexual well-being would have been closely guarded by her parents.

It is not out of bounds to guess Mary had never even been left alone with a man, and that she had been kept away from them in almost any situation for the previous several years. With that in mind, imagine her shock when the unthinkable happened. Take a few minutes to re-read Luke 1:26-38 with fresh eyes.

The Bible doesn't say what form Gabriel took when giving the announcement to Mary, or where, when, or how he did so. What did Gabriel look like, and what kind of voice or thought transmission did he use? Did Gabriel come during the day, or during a dream? Did it take place at Mary's home or in a public place?

The Bible does say Mary was troubled about how Gabriel's words first struck her. But we don't get any information as to emotions after the conversation ended, or how she felt for the next three months.

It seems unlikely that Mary would not have had some sympathy for her parents, and some trepidation about the social and religious implications of her sudden pregnancy. But can you even begin to imagine her wonder and happiness about becoming the mother of God's son? Wouldn't you guess that her mother and father would have kept her news a secret? They maybe even thought she was acting crazy. How could she have gotten pregnant when she had never been with a man!

The Bible doesn't say Mary's mother went with her to the house of Elizabeth, but it seems likely she would have done so. If so, Mary's mother would have been hoping that Mary would come to her senses and quit pretending that she was pregnant.

Then the unthinkable happens! Mary walks through the door and Elizabeth begins celebrating the fact that Mary is pregnant. And Elizabeth isn't a nobody. She is the one who had become miraculously pregnant at an old age. As Mary's mother slowly began accepting the story and its implications, perhaps all three of them began a unique, joyous celebration.

**Episode:** Christmas Series No. 6

**Narrator:** Joseph

**Primary Scriptures:** Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 1:26-28

**Story Summary:** Joseph tells of the events surrounding his marriage to Mary

**Location:** Nazareth

**Time:** Circa 4 BC

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** Matthew 1:22-23

The Bible gives little information about Mary's husband, Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus. Matthew 1:16-25 contains virtually all that is known about Joseph prior to his trip to Bethlehem for Jesus's birth.

Try to imagine the feelings of Joseph as the angel of the Lord told him that his fiancé was impregnated by the Holy Spirit. How could anyone, especially a righteous Jewish man, process such an event? This is how Joseph reacted: he did what the angel of the Lord commanded him to do and took Mary home as his wife.

The Bible doesn't say when Joseph took Mary home, but in the hours, days, or months between her being found to be pregnant and her arrival at his house, there must have been a myriad of emotions of the people involved: Joseph and his family members, Mary and her family members, neighbors, rabbis, and others in the community. Few people in Nazareth would have been exempt from being involved emotionally.

Under the customs of that time, betrothal was equivalent to being married, except that the betrothed did not have sexual relations. That is why Matthew 1:16 says Joseph was her husband. That same verse says that Joseph was faithful to the law. According to the Leviticus 20:10, both parties to adultery by neighbors were to be put to death. There was no alternative, such as divorce. Joseph was in a complete dilemma. He did not want to publicly disgrace Mary, but he was trapped as to what to do.

That trap did not necessarily go away after he took Mary home as his wife. His conscience would have been clear because of the information he received from the angel, but the community of Nazareth would likely have been accusatory, and those accusations would follow Jesus throughout his life. In John 8:41, the Jewish leaders seem to accuse Jesus of being illegitimate.

The first mention of Joseph shows him as being obedient to God under the most unusual and unique circumstances, and most of the remaining mentions of Joseph demonstrate that obedience. Perhaps their obedience is why Joseph and Mary were chosen to be the

parents of Jesus. Maybe this is why one of the first descriptions of their son, Jesus, was: “he was completely obedient to them.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke 2:51

**Episode:** Christmas Series No. 7

**Narrator:** Tax Collector

**Primary Scriptures:** Luke 2:1-7

**Story Summary:** A tax collector tells of the world-wide census and its effects on Bethlehem

**Location:** Bethlehem

**Time:** Circa 4 BC

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** Luke 2:4

The story of the location of Jesus' birth might be said to begin when the Israelites first settled in Canaan. The tribe of Judah was given much of the southern lands, including the village of Bethlehem. Hundreds of years later, when the future King David was born, the tribe of Judah continued to possess Bethlehem. Centuries later, after the exiles of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, the lines of tribal ownership seem to have dimmed in importance.

By the time of Jesus' birth, it probably wasn't unusual that Joseph, of the tribe of Judah, was located in Nazareth, far to the north of the original land of Judah. The Bible gives no reason why Joseph was located there, but Luke 2:4 says Joseph had to go from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea because he had to register there for the new census. It says he had to go to Bethlehem because he was of the house and line of David.

The details for the census are lost, but it is highly likely it was taken for at least two reasons: taxation and counting men eligible for the military. Historians argue about when and if the Jews were exempt for service in the Roman military, but it is highly likely the Romans would have at least wanted to know how many might be available to fight for—or against—Rome.

Rome was in a constant battle with its conquered countries and provinces about taxes, and Roman officials were often selected based on their ability to maximize tax revenue while maintaining peace. The only way Rome could know if taxes were being maximized was to know what assets and revenues were available to be taxed. Hence: a census.

Also lost to history are the records about who had to go where to register for the census. One assumption is that all Jewish males had to go to the hometown of their ancestors at the time of David, which would've been about a thousand years prior at that time. Since any written family records of that era would have been destroyed, everyone would have determined their hometown based on their family's oral histories. There could have been other rules, of course, but under most scenarios, it can be reasonably assumed that relative to the size of tiny Bethlehem, a large number of people would have descended on the village to register for the census. It is likely that housing would have been in short supply.

Historians disagree on the exact accommodations that Joseph and Mary secured. Some believe it was a cave where animals were fed, while others believe it was in a room of a private house used to keep and feed animals.



**Episode:** Christmas Series No. 8

**Narrator:** King Herod

**Primary Scriptures:** Matthew 2

**Story Summary:** King Herod tells about the impending birth of Jesus

**Location:** Jerusalem

**Time:** Circa 4 BC

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** Matthew 2:8

Herod the Great is one of the most fascinating characters in the Bible, partially because his story plays out against the backdrop of world events. In 63 BC, the expanding reach of Rome was displayed when Pompey the Great captured Jerusalem. A war of rebellion by the Israelites loomed, so in stepped the peacekeepers, including Herod the Great. He was appointed governor of Galilee in 47 BC, and helped keep war at bay while still collecting taxes.

Herod was a friend of Mark Antony, but successfully changed sides to Octavian, who would become Emperor Augustus. In 40 BC, Herod was appointed King of Judea, and ruled as a client king. He would keep that title until his death in about 4 BC.

Herod was known as Herod the Great because of his astounding building projects including the renovation of the Temple and Temple Mount, the creation of the deep-water port Caesarea Maritima, and elaborate palaces at Masada and Herodium.

Herod was known for his brutality and his extreme loyalty to Rome. He died in Jericho, but was buried at his fortress south of Jerusalem, Herodium. Due to a putrefying illness known as "Herod's Evil," he lived his final years in a pain so extreme that he attempted suicide. According to the historian, Josephus, Herod was so concerned nobody would mourn his death that he commanded a large group of distinguished Jews be killed at his death so there would be large public displays of grief. This command was, fortunately, not carried out.

While alive, Herod seemingly killed several of his family members because he was paranoid about their desire to displace him. It is against the backdrop of all of these circumstances that the wise men came to him asking for his help in locating the King of the Jews. According to Matthew 2:3, King Herod, along with all of Jerusalem, was disturbed when the Magi made their request. Herod's paranoia would have kicked into high gear, and was certainly the reason he concocted a plan to find the supposed king and kill him.

When the plan of Herod did not work, he gave orders to kill all the baby boys less than two years old living in the vicinity of Bethlehem. Herod's desperate plan did nothing but cause useless harm and pain. Thanks to an angel's warning, the baby Jesus was on his way to Egypt, or had already arrived there.

**Episode:** Christmas Series No. 9

**Narrator:** A Shepherd

**Primary Scriptures:** Luke 2:1-20

**Story Summary:** A shepherd tells about the angels appearing over the fields

**Location:** Bethlehem

**Time:** Circa 4 BC

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** Luke 2:20

The Bible gives few details surrounding the actual birth of Jesus. Matthew writes about Joseph taking Mary as his wife, but skips from there until after Jesus has arrived. He writes of the Magi, but indicates that whole story takes place after Jesus's birth.

Luke tells the reasons why Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem, and that there was no guest room available for them. When the baby was born, Mary wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger.

Many assume Mary wrapped Jesus tightly in cloth because that was probably the custom at the time. The manger was a small feeding trough, likely filled with fresh straw. It might have looked like a modern baby bed in size. It isn't known whether they were staying in a cave or a barn-like room.

Luke 2:8-20 tells the story of the shepherds, angels, and the shepherds' trip to Bethlehem to see the child who had just been born that day. Some speculate the shepherds were awake because it was lambing season in the spring, while others guess the shepherds were in charge of the sacrificial lambs owned by the Temple and priests. Most see a parallel of the birth of Jesus taking place in the city of David, who was famously a shepherd himself.

One of the most interesting statements of the angel is that Jesus is the Messiah, the Lord, the first time that statement is made. It is also apparent that Jesus' birth and the circumstances around it resulted in God being glorified. For the entire life of Jesus, God being glorified was the result that happened when Jesus was around.

Luke 2:17-18 says the shepherds spread the word about the angel's proclamation and the story of the baby Jesus. It is likely the shepherds were low on the social register, so the people they told were likely of their own humble social status. God did not concern himself with the popular earthly rulers, but the common people who would accept the truth and praise Him.

Perhaps that is a good lesson for us today. We are to tell the people around us about the wonderful news of Jesus. If we do so, they will glorify God and thank him for the Good News.

**Episode:** Christmas Series No. 10

**Narrator:** Angel

**Primary Scriptures:** Luke 2:1-20

**Story Summary:** An angel recounts the events surrounding the birth of Jesus

**Location:** Bethlehem

**Time:** Circa 4 BC

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** Luke 2:13-14

Matthew 2:8-9 tells of the wise men following the star until it stopped over the place where Jesus was born, while Luke 2:8-15 tells of the angel appearing to the shepherds, then joined by a great company of angels. This episode combines those parts of the story along with the fact that there would have been numerous stars in the night sky to begin with.

The purpose of this episode is to point out that many things that God put into place for the birth of Jesus to take place as it did. God knew long, long beforehand that Jesus would need to come to earth and be crucified for mankind's sins. Throughout the Old Testament, beginning with the Garden of Eden, there are hints of the coming of Jesus.

From our limited viewpoint, it is sometimes hard to determine when God put certain people in place to do certain things, or whether he just worked within what was happening anyway. Certainly, the births of John and Jesus were miraculous, but the census and King Herod were circumstances and people easily used.

Some of the messages of the angel deserve special examination. The angel brought good news that will cause great joy for all people. This is reminiscent of God's promise to Abraham that all people would be blessed through him. Through Jesus, all people have the ability to become the children of God. That is very good news.

The angel said that Jesus is the Messiah, the Lord. By saying that, the angel confirmed that Jesus is the savior of the world. He saves everyone through the cross. The Jews were looking for a savior, and Jesus was it.

The result of Jesus being born was that the angels all glorified God. Glorifying God is the purpose of all mankind. Through the birth of Jesus, mankind began to be empowered to do that.

The angel said that God's peace will rest on those God favors. Through Jesus, everyone has the potential to receive God's favor and peace.

What a miraculous night! The God who created the Universe came to earth in the form of a helpless baby, all so that mankind can be reconciled to God and receive eternal life.