



- ◀ **REVIEW PREVIOUS STORIES** (*Guide the group as they give an overview of previous stories and retell the last story*)
- ▼ **TELL THE STORY** (*Don't just read it—know it and bring it to life!*)

400 years had passed since God had spoken to his people. The Israelites, called Jews, had been under the control of other nations for hundreds of years. They were now ruled by the Romans, the most powerful empire that had ever existed. The Jews were still waiting and hoping for a king who would come to save them and lead them into victory.

Finally, God sent an angel to a young woman named Mary in the town of Nazareth. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph who was a descendant of King David.

The angel, named Gabriel, appeared to her and said, “*Don't be afraid Mary, God has chosen to bless you! You will become pregnant and have a son and you are to name him Jesus. (which means 'God saves'). He will become a king whose kingdom will never end!*”

Mary asked the angel, “*But how can I have a baby, I am still a virgin?*”

The angel replied, “*This will happen supernaturally by God's Spirit, so this baby will be called God's Son. Remember... nothing is impossible with God!*”

Mary said, “*I am God's servant. May everything you have said come true!*”

After that Mary sang to God thanking him for choosing to bless her.

And just as the angel had said, Mary became pregnant.

When Joseph found out that Mary was expecting a child, he decided to break off their engagement quietly. The law would have permitted him to have her killed if she had an affair.

But one night Joseph had a dream. An angel appeared to him and said, “*Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The child in her is from God. You are to give him the name Jesus for he will save the people from their sins.*”

So Joseph took Mary as his wife, but he did not sleep with her until after the baby was born.

Months later, as Joseph and Mary were traveling to Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to give birth. No rooms were available for them at the local inns so they found an animal stable, and that is where their baby was born. They named the boy Jesus, meaning “one who saves”, just as the angel had told them. Mary wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a feed trough.

That night a group of shepherds were out in the fields taking care of their sheep when an angel suddenly appeared and frightened them. The angel said, “*Don't be afraid, I am bringing good news for everyone! The one who will save you, the Messiah, has been born tonight in Bethlehem! You will know it's him when you find a baby in a stable wrapped in strips of cloth.*”

The shepherds said to each other, “*Let's go to Bethlehem as fast as we can to see the miracle God told us about.*” When the shepherds ran into town they found Joseph, Mary and the baby in the stable just as the angel had said. After this they went and told everyone what they had heard and seen—and the people were truly amazed!

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A few months later, wise men traveled from distant lands to find the newborn king.

A star had guided them from the east to Bethlehem and stopped over the place where Mary and Joseph were living. As the wise men entered the house they were overcome with joy and kneeled down and worshipped Jesus. They brought him expensive gifts of gold, spices and perfumes.

Eventually Joseph and Mary moved back to Nazareth where Jesus grew strong, wise and full of God's grace.

When Jesus was twelve years old, he and his family attended the annual Passover Festival in Jerusalem. (*Do you remember the first Passover?*)

On the way home, Joseph and Mary assumed that Jesus was in their caravan but traveling with some of their other relatives. Later, when they stopped to sleep for the night, they realized he was nowhere to be found.

In a panic, Joseph and Mary went back to Jerusalem to look for Jesus. Three days later they finally found him—he was in the temple courts discussing deep questions with the religious teachers. The teachers were all amazed at his understanding and insights. His parents didn't know what to think.

*“Son!” his mother said to him. “Why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic and have searched for you everywhere.”*

*“But why did you need to search?” Jesus asked. “You should have known that I would be in my Father’s house.”* But Joseph and Mary didn't understand what he meant.

So Jesus returned to Nazareth with his parents and was obedient to them. His mother thought deeply about what had happened.

Jesus grew in both height and wisdom and was loved by God and everyone who knew him.



▲ **RETELL THE STORY** (*This may seem redundant, but it is very effective in helping the listeners own the story*)

▼ **DIALOGUE** (*These questions are a good start for you to draw out the group's observations about the story*)

- **What did we learn about Joseph? ...about Mary?**
- **What was unique about Jesus' birth? Where was he born?**
- **Why do you think it was important for Jesus to be born of a virgin mother?**
- **Who was Jesus a descendant of? How might this be significant?**
- **What else did you hear in this story that reminds you of what the prophets said about the promised Messiah?**
- **What does the name Jesus mean?**  
*Another name given to Jesus was Emmanuel, which means 'God with us'!*
- **We have all probably heard this story before as part of "The Christmas Story". What jumps out at you now as new or different?**

◆ **APPLICATION** (*Optional questions that also work well in smaller groups*)

- What did you notice from the story for the first time?
- What questions do you have about the story? What do you wonder about?
- How did the story challenge or encourage you?
- How do you think that people reacted to being told that the Messiah had been born?
- How would you have reacted? Would you have expected his entrance to the world to be different?
- If Jesus was sent to give the world a great gift, why do you think we focus so much on what we get at Christmas?
- How can we best celebrate and remember the birth of Jesus?
- What can you do to celebrate this personally?