

The Christmas Story – as told by Dr Sarah Baldwin

December 13, 2024



The Christmas Story

As told by
Rev. Dr. Sarah Baldwin

I am very honored to get to share a story with you today about the birth of Jesus.

Many people have told the story that I am about to tell.

This is the story that changes everything about everything.

It is a special story that it is the Bible. It is a story that changes everything about everything. It's a true story, full of miracles and mystery.



This is a story about a girl named Mary.

A long time ago a girl named Mary lived in Nazareth in Northern Israel, near the Sea of Galilee. We do not know a lot about Mary's childhood, but we do know that she was Jewish, and that Jews were under Roman rule at that time. The Romans had occupied their land. At that time, the ruler was King Herod.

Mary was probably about 14-years-old. She was unmarried and a virgin. This is important to know because of what I am about to tell you in just a moment. Mary was also engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. Joseph was also Jewish, and his family came from the lineage of King David. Several centuries before this story takes place, King David ruled as a beloved king of the Jewish people. Several prophecies were made that a king would come from the ancestral line of David and that new king would bring a reign of justice and peace. For the Jewish people who were under occupation and Roman rule, this was a hope to which they clung.



An angel appeared to Mary.






One day Mary was by herself, probably doing household chores, or going for a walk to get water when an angel of the Lord appeared to her. The Bible says that God sent an angel to Mary to give her a special message. I wonder what that angel looked like, don't you? I don't think I have ever seen an angel, unless I have, and I didn't know it. But I think I would be afraid if I saw an angelic being. How would you feel? Would you be terrified if an angelic being appeared to you with a message for you from God? I believe that most of would. And so was Mary.

The angel said to her, "Greetings, you who are very special to God! The Lord is with you!"

Mary did feel very afraid. She felt so afraid the angel said to her, "You have no need to be afraid, Mary. God has a surprise for you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and his name will be Jesus. He will be great, and he will be called 'Son of the Highest.' The Lord God will give him the throne of the line of David; and he will rule forever."

Mary must have been stunned.

	<p>“What are you talking about?”, she asked the angel. “I am engaged to be married, but I am a virgin. There is no way I could be pregnant.”</p> <p>The angel said to her, “Mary, the Holy Spirit of God will do a miracle in your womb. You will become pregnant. Even your cousin Elizabeth is pregnant in her old age as a sign that God is doing miracles. Nothing is impossible with God!”</p> <p>Mary must have felt overwhelmed, terrified, and in awe. Then Mary said something humble, powerful and beautiful, all at the same time. Mary said, “Yes.” Mary said, “I am a servant of God.”</p> <p>Wow. It is hard to imagine what it must have felt like for Mary to say “yes” to God. In those days and in that culture, to be pregnant and unmarried was an almost unbearable shame. Mary may have thought that this meant that her fiancé would break the engagement. She may have imagined that her family would be ashamed of her and that her baby would grow up without a family name and most likely in desperate poverty. But even in the possibility of those very hard circumstances, God gave Mary the courage to yes.</p> <p>Indeed, Mary did become pregnant, and a baby began to grow in her womb. I imagine that her family noticed. Somehow Joseph, Mary’s fiancé, became aware that Mary was pregnant. He intended to quietly break off their marriage because he did not want to publicly disgrace her.</p>
 <p>An angel came to Joseph in a dream.</p>	<p>But God sent an angel to Joseph in a dream and said, “Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. She will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”</p> <p>What an incredible dream! When Joseph woke up, Joseph did what the angel of God said to do. Joseph married Mary and brought her home as his wife. This is an extraordinary story! What do you think? Angels and dreams and a surprise virgin pregnancy! Then, a fiancé who obeyed God and did not break off the wedding? This story is full of miracles and mystery.</p> <p>But there is even more.</p>
 <p>Mary went to be with her cousin Elizabeth.</p>	<p>Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Remember, Elizabeth was the cousin who was also pregnant as a sign of the coming of the new king. Elizabeth was in her old age, and she was barren. God also gave her a baby! When Mary saw Elizabeth, Elizabeth’s baby leaped in Mary’s womb!</p> <p>Mary said: “I’m bursting with God-news; I’m dancing the song of my Savior God. God took one good look at me, and look what happened— I’m the most fortunate woman on earth! God’s mercy flows in wave after wave on those who are in awe before him. The starving poor will sit down to a banquet; but the callous rich will be left out in the cold. God has remembered his people and piled on the mercies, piled them high. It’s exactly what God has promised!”</p>

	<p>Mary knew that Jesus would bring hope, mercy, and justice. After a few months of staying together with Elizabeth, Mary returned back to be with Joseph.</p>
 <p>Mary and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem.</p>	<p>Then, a census was announced to be taken throughout the Roman empire. Everyone had to go to their ancestral home to be accounted for. Joseph was part of the family line of King David, and David was from Bethlehem. So, Joseph and Mary journeyed for about a week, most likely on foot or maybe on a donkey, to Bethlehem to be counted.</p> <p>When they arrived, it was time for the baby to be born.</p>
 <p>Baby Jesus was born in a cave or stable.</p>	<p>Joseph had some family in Bethlehem, but apparently there were so many people visiting, that the little family could only find a place to rest in a stable full of animals.</p> <p>Mary had her baby in the stable.</p>
	<p>The first bed the baby had was the animal's feeding trough called a manger. Mary wrapped the baby in a blanket, and they named him Jesus.</p>
	<p>That first night after baby Jesus was born, Mary was resting and taking care of him. The room was calm and peaceful, when suddenly, Joseph noticed some shepherds peeking in at their little family. The shepherds looked amazed and were panting as if they had run a long way. "Is this the Messiah!?" they exclaimed with wide eyes. They gathered around the manger, staring at the tiny baby, filled with wonder. "You won't believe what just happened!" they said excitedly and began to share their incredible adventure.</p>
 <p>An angel came to the the shepherds to tell the good news.</p>	<p>The shepherds had been camping out with their sheep near Bethlehem when something almost unbelievable occurred. Suddenly, an angel from God appeared before them! They were so frightened they could hardly move. But the angel said, "Don't be afraid! I have the best news ever! It's great news for you and for everyone in the world! The Savior has just been born in Bethlehem! He's lying in a manger, wrapped in a blanket."</p> <p>Then the shepherds said that after the angel spoke, the sky lit up with a beautiful choir of angels singing, "Glory to God! Peace to everyone on Earth who makes God happy!"</p>



The shepherds went to Bethlehem to see and worship the baby named Jesus

“We had to come as fast as we could to see the Messiah, the Savior!” the shepherds told Mary and Joseph, their eyes shining with tears of joy as they looked at the beautiful sleeping baby.

It was a moment filled with love and wonder, as everyone shared the joy of this miraculous night.

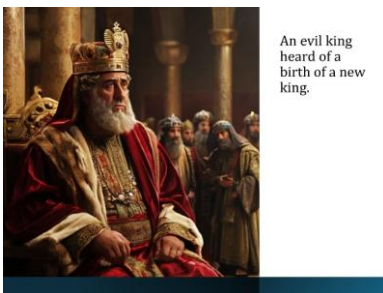


Mary pondered all these things in her heart.

Mary looked around at everyone gathered in the room. She saw Joseph's loving eyes shining as he looked down at their new baby. The shepherds gazed at baby Jesus with awe and admiration, their faces filled with wonder. Mary gently reached out to touch her baby's tiny hand, and to her delight, he grasped her finger with a sweet little reflex. She carefully lifted her precious boy into her arms and pressed her face against his soft cheek.

In that moment, all the amazing things that had happened in the past months—the words of the shepherds and the promise of the angel—filled her heart with joy. Mary cherished these moments, savoring them deep within her spirit, knowing they would stay with her forever. It was a time of love, warmth, and pure happiness as they welcomed their beautiful baby into the world.

But that feeling did not last forever. Do you remember how I told you that King Herod ruled the land? Well, here is where King Herod comes back into the story.



An evil king heard of a birth of a new king.

While Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus stayed in Bethlehem, a group of wise scholars in the far east noticed a bright star shining in the sky. They believed this star meant that a prophecy of the birth of the King of the Jews and come to pass. So, they set off on a journey to find and honor the newborn king.

When they arrived in the big city of Jerusalem which was near Bethlehem, they asked everyone, "Where can we find the new King? We saw the star that announced his birth, and we want to worship him!" When King Herod heard about this, he became very frightened of losing power and of the Jewish people rising up against him. He quickly called together all the important priests and scholars in the city and asked them, "Where is the new king supposed to be born?"

They replied, "In Bethlehem, in the land of Judah. A prophet told us this long ago:

"You, Bethlehem, are very special. From you will come a leader who will guide my people, Israel."

Herod, trying to act friendly, invited the wise scholars to a secret meeting. He pretended to be just as excited as they were and asked them when they first saw the star. He told them about the prophecy and said, "Go find this child! When you find him, let me know, so I can come and worship him too."

The scholars followed the king's instructions and set off on their journey. Soon, the star appeared again, shining brightly above them. It led them right to the place where the child was. They were filled with joy—they had finally arrived!



Scholars called wise men worshipped Jesus.

When they entered the house, they saw baby Jesus in his mother Mary's arms. Overcome with happiness, they knelt down and worshiped him. Then, they opened their bags and brought out precious gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. That night, the scholars had a dream that warned them not to go back to Herod. So, they decided to take a different path home, sneaking away quietly and returning to their own country, keeping the special secret of baby Jesus safe. And so, the story of the newborn King spread far and wide, filling hearts with hope and joy.

After the wise scholars left, something very important happened. God sent an angel to Joseph in a dream. The angel said, "Wake up! Take Mary and the baby and flee to Egypt right away. Stay there until I tell you to come back. King Herod is looking for the child and wants to harm him."



Joseph and Mary fled as refugees.

Joseph listened to the angel. He quickly got up, gathered Mary and the baby Jesus, and they quietly left their home in the dark of night. By the time the sun came up, they were already on their way to Egypt, safe and sound.

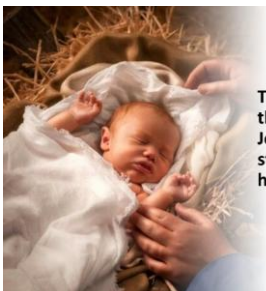
Herod ordered all the baby boys under 2 years old killed.



Meanwhile, when King Herod realized that the wise scholars had outsmarted him, he became very angry. In his fury, he ordered that every little boy in Bethlehem and the nearby hills, two years old and under, be killed. He made this terrible decision based on what he had learned from the scholars and in his fear and anger.



Mary, Joseph and Jesus settled as refugees in Egypt for a number of years, until it was safe to return and then they went home to Nazareth where Jesus grew up. The Bible says he grew up strong and filled with wisdom, and God's favor was upon him.





The story of the birth of Jesus is a story of hope.

The story of the birth of Jesus is a story filled with wonder, mystery, angels, courage, danger and suffering. It is most importantly a story of hope.

What this story means is that God sent us Jesus as a baby. Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. Another name for Jesus is Emmanuel. Emmanuel means God-is-with-us. God loves us so much that God sent us Jesus, His son, to show us the way to God. Jesus announced the kingdom of God on earth when He came to us. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of peace, justice, holiness, love and joy. Someday, for those who follow Jesus, we will fully live in the kingdom of God.

This story has many gifts for us, but I want to name two of the gifts. There are gifts that change everything about everything for us.

	<p>This story means that God is with you and with me today. No matter what hard circumstances you have experienced. No matter what impossible decisions you had to make. No matter if you had to leave because you were in danger or because you followed your family. God is with you. This is one of the best gifts of Christmas. God is with you. Always.</p> <p>Another gift from this story is that God tells us “Do not be afraid.” When God is with us, we also know that God is whispering to us, “No matter what, do not be afraid. I am with you.”</p> <p>This is the story that changes everything about everything. Since Jesus was born, we know that the kingdom of God will reign in the end of time. Love, peace, and justice will come to earth. Jesus started that kingdom all those years ago. We now wait in expectancy for the kingdom of God to be fully revealed.</p> <p>The gift of Christmas is that God loves you so much that He sent His son to rescue you and bring you into the kingdom of heaven and God will set all things right. God will bring justice and peace. But that here and now, today--God is with you.</p>
	<p>Over these days of Christmas, if you are willing, ask God to open your eyes to His presence in your life. My prayer for you and your family is that you will know that you are not alone, and that God is with you. I also pray that you experience the deep love of Jesus this Christmas.</p> <p>Look for the Christmas star. Not necessarily a star in the sky. What I mean is—look for signs that God is with you.</p>
	<p>Thank you for listening to this true story.</p> <p>Because Jesus was born, we have hope.</p> <p>Merry Christmas!</p>