

# THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

## THE RESCUE *begins*

### GOD THE SON

### *God Becomes a Baby!*

Ponder for a moment the title of today’s lesson – God Becomes a Baby... The Almighty Creator took human shape as a baby born to a lowly Jewish girl in an animal trough in an obscure village. The Jews for centuries had been expecting a Messiah – a King – a Savior for the people. Having such a lowly birth was not how most would expect a king to come. But, the King for the Ages came that way for a reason. When this Baby became a Man, He said in **Matthew 23:12 (ESV)** <sup>12</sup> *Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.* But why? What reason could there possibly be for God to humble Himself to the point of becoming a human baby? Jesus explained in **John 3:16 (ESV)** <sup>16</sup> *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* Death had been promised when sin came into the world; the only Son of God would make a way of escape from the promise of death with a promise of life for those who believe!

God becoming a baby has a theological name – the incarnation – which means ‘in the flesh’. It is one of the central doctrines of Christianity.. Isaiah had foretold of this virgin birth centuries before (**Isaiah 7:14**). The Baby born to Mary would be ‘God with skin on’ coming to earth for the purpose of saving us from our sins. The Jeremiah Study Bible says that Hebrew scriptures contain more than 300 promises regarding the coming Savior whom they referred to as the Messiah. Each of those promises would be fulfilled when God became a baby born in humble circumstances.

**Read Luke 2:1-7 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.* <sup>2</sup> *This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria.* <sup>3</sup> *And all went to be registered, each to his own town.* <sup>4</sup> *And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David,* <sup>5</sup> *to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.* <sup>6</sup> *And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.* <sup>7</sup> *And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*



The distance from Nazareth to Bethlehem was approximately 90 miles. Luke wrote of a census conducted by the Roman Empire. Roman historical records place the enrollment of Quirinius in 7 A.D. which would have been 10 or 12 years after Jesus was born. This historical discrepancy was for a long time troublesome to biblical students. However, archeologists continue to confirm the accuracy of the Word of God. Ancient papyri have been discovered from which it is learned that Quirinius was governor of Syria two times. This explains why Luke wrote: *the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria*. It has also been found that people were required to go to their ancestral homes to register. This was something similar to our U.S. census which has been taken every ten years since 1790.

Mary wrapped her firstborn son Jesus in swaddling clothes. Swaddling clothes were bandages tightly wrapped around a newborn child. The rank of the child was indicated by the splendor and costliness of these bands. Wealthy parents used white linen or expensive purple cloth and gold bands. Jesus' swaddling would have been very ordinary. Infants were wrapped firm and tight similar to how we have seen pictures of mummies. Even in His birth, we are reminded of Christ's death. Similar wrappings were used to wrap the body of those who had died. Jesus was born to die for our sins so that we could have eternal life.

We love to associate the birth of Christ with snow. However, the month and day of Jesus' birth are unknown. December 25 was chosen in the 4<sup>th</sup> century as the day to celebrate Jesus' birth. This date coincided with the winter solstice and had been the date for a pagan feast. Christians tried to transform it into a time to commemorate Christ's birth.

The angel's appearance to the shepherds reveals that the Baby who was God was born for those on the margins of society.

**Read Luke 2:8-17 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup> *And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.* <sup>9</sup> *And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.* <sup>10</sup> *And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.* <sup>11</sup> *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.* <sup>12</sup> *And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."* <sup>13</sup> *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,* <sup>14</sup> *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"* <sup>15</sup> *When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."* <sup>16</sup> *And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.* <sup>17</sup> *And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.*

Shepherding in Judah was not as desirable as it once had been and was assigned to hirelings, slaves, and younger sons. By the time of Mary and Joseph, the shepherds occupied the lowest rung on the ladder of society. They were looked upon as outcasts because their occupations prevented them from keeping the

religious rituals required for ceremonial cleanness. They were not even allowed to testify in court because of their untrustworthiness.

Tradition says that the shepherds were tending sacrificial animals that were to be used in the Jerusalem temple offerings. Luke does not verify this. Tradition also says that their field was next to the place where Ruth, the daughter-in-law of Naomi, gleaned for grain when she first came to Bethlehem. But, the Bible does not verify this. What would God want us to remember about the shepherds? God wants us to remember that He gave His message of the Savior to ordinary people – the same message that He gives to us to share with others today, that is you have a *Savior, who is Christ the Lord*.

God humbled Himself and became a Baby not only for the marginalized; he was also born for the nations.

**Read Matthew 2:1-12 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> “‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’” <sup>7</sup> Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” <sup>9</sup> After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

We don't know the number of the men who came in search of THE KING. The world still wonders today about these men from the East (likely from Persia formerly Babylon) who sought out the baby Jesus. Legend has named them Balthasar, Melchior, and Caspar or Gaspar. However, these names first appeared in a mosaic in a 6th-century church in Ravenna, Italy, not in the Bible. The Scripture leaves the men nameless. The Bible does not indicate how many wise men searched for Jesus. Some believe there were three since three gifts were mentioned. Our lesson writer suggests their entourage might have included as many as 100 if they traveled with the Persian cavalry. Their worship of Him would indicate their endorsement of the new monarch.

In modern nativity scenes, we picture the wise men as kings. but they were ‘magi’ – wise men who were also wealthy and scholars—scientists in their own right. No scholarly person who follows the light God gives him can miss worshipping at the feet of Jesus. These wise men were Gentiles – a reminder that the

Messiah was for all nations – not just the Jews. Undoubtedly they were somewhat acquainted with certain prophecies, possibly that of Daniel, whose book was written partly in the Hebrew and partly in Aramaic. The entire Old Testament had been translated into Greek some two centuries earlier. It was known as the Septuagint and was available to scholars throughout the world.

Guided by a star they came inquiring as to the place in which He might be found. Many theories have been suggested regarding the star's identity. However, nothing can be pinpointed or confirmed. It could have been a natural occurrence but I personally believe it was a supernatural event like the other miracles surrounding the life of Christ. When the Baby became a Man, He would say in **John 8:12 (ESV)** <sup>12</sup> ..., *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

Their question, *"Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?"* proved most distracting to the old wretch who sat on the throne at that time – one of the most wicked kings that ever reigned. He called a meeting of the chief priests and scribes, and sought from them the answer to the inquiry of the eastern visitors. Without hesitation they pointed him to the prophecy of **Micah 5:2 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup> *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.* These chief priests and scribes knew the Scripture; yet subsequent events proved they were unprepared to welcome Him of whom those sacred records spoke.

Even in the gifts the wise men gave to Jesus, we find important reminders of the precious baby's true identity. Gold – a gift fit for a king. Jesus is the King of Glory! Frankincense – a gift for a priest – Jesus is our high priest ever interceding for us to the Father. Myrrh – a gift whose name means bitter was used to prepare dead bodies for burial foreshadowing the suffering of our Savior.

The birth of our Savior occurred against a backdrop of great evil. We see the evidence of this from what happened after the wise men's visit to King Herod. There may have been a time difference between the birth of Jesus and the arrival of the wise men. Some believe as much as two years. We don't know and Herod did not know either. He had the boy babies in the Bethlehem area from two years old and under brutally killed. And sadly, even these murders were prophesied. **Jeremiah 31:15 (ESV)** <sup>15</sup> *Thus says the LORD: "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more."* Think of this prophecy in relation to Bible pictures. Rachel died giving birth to a son she named Benoni, which means 'son of my sorrow,' but Jacob chose to name that son Benjamin, 'son of my right hand'. Benjamin's birth brought suffering and sorrow to his mother but exaltation to his father. Rachel's sorrow was a picture of the future Bethlehem mothers who would mourn over the loss of their baby boys at the decree of the hate-filled Herod. Jesus like Benjamin was born the Man of Sorrows, but He now sits exalted at His Father's right hand!