

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

BIBLE TEXT : Matthew 2:1-23; Luke 2:1-20.

LESSON 417 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Matthew 2:1-23

¹ Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

² Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

³ When Herod the king had heard *these things*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

⁴ And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

⁵ And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

⁶ And thou Bethlehem, *in* the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

⁷ Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found *him*, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

⁹ When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

¹¹ And when they were come into the house, they saw the young

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I The Birth of Christ

1. Jesus was born at Bethlehem, the City of David, Matthew 2:1, 5, 6; Luke 2:1-7;

John 7:42

⁴² Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?

Micah 5:2

² But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting.

2. Jesus' earthly heritage was humble and poor, His birthplace was a manger, Luke 2:7, 12;

Psalm 2:7

⁷ I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou *art* my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

Isaiah 9:6

⁶ For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:7

⁷ Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

II The Visit of the Shepherds

1. The glory of the Lord appeared, and the angel brought good tidings to the shepherds, Luke 2:8-12;

Acts 5:31

³¹ Him hath God exalted with his right hand *to be* a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

Isaiah 52:7

⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!

2. A multitude of the heavenly Host joined in praising God, Luke 2:13, 14;

Revelation 19:6

⁶ And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

3. When the angels had returned to Heaven, the shepherds went to Bethlehem, Luke 2:15.

4. They found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a

child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

¹² And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

¹³ And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

¹⁴ When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

¹⁵ And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

¹⁶ Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wrath, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.

¹⁷ Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,

¹⁸ In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping *for* her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

¹⁹ But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

²⁰ Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and

manger, Luke 2:16.

5. The shepherds spread abroad the wonderful things that they had seen and heard, Luke 2:17–20.

III The Wise Men and the Star

1. The wise men, following Jesus' star, came to Jerusalem from the East, Matthew 2:1–7;

Numbers

24:17

¹⁷ I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.

2. When the wise men found that Bethlehem was Jesus' birthplace, they started for that city and once again saw His star, Matthew 2:8–10.

3. Jesus the Saviour was the object of adoration of the wise men, Matthew 2:11;

Matthew 14:33

³³ Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

Psalms 95:6

⁶ O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker.

4. Being warned of God, the wise men returned home another way, and Joseph took Mary and the infant Jesus into Egypt, Matthew 2:12–15;

Hosea 11:1

¹ When Israel *was* a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.

5. Herod sent forth and slew all the children in the coasts of Bethlehem, two years old and under, Matthew 2:16–18;

Jeremiah 31:15

¹⁵ Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, *and* bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they *were* not.

6. The Holy Family returned to the land of Israel and Nazareth after Herod's death, Matthew 2:19–23;

John 1:45

⁴⁵ Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

John 1:46

⁴⁶ And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

NOTES:

The Promised Messiah

As this cheerful Christmas season is observed, may we direct our thoughts to the events that make Christmas possible. Think of the incomparable Gift that God gave to men. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

For centuries the promised Messiah had been the cherished hope of God's people. Now on this first Christmas night, the promise became reality; and with a glorious display that was worthy of the Son of God, Jesus came to earth in the likeness of man, to dwell among men. Yes, Jesus was God's Gift to the world, but He came willingly to pay the price of man's redemption. Jesus knew that the Cross lay at the end of His earthly pilgrimage, but His only desire was to do the will of His Father. God desires only one thing of us in return for the love

go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.

²¹ And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

²² But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:

²³ And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

Luke 2:1-20

¹ And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

² (*And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.*)

³ And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

⁵ To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

⁶ And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

⁸ And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

⁹ And, lo, the angel of the Lord

that He has manifested: He asks that we love and serve Him. Jesus gave His life for us. Should not we give our lives to Him in gratitude?

Good Tidings

So momentous was the event when the Saviour was born, that God sent an angel from Heaven to proclaim the good news. The angel was not sent to the crowded cities of the Jews; He was sent to the simple shepherds on the Judean hills. Without question, these openhearted people had had a love for God and a yearning to see His Word fulfilled. Suddenly the night watches of their eastern sky were illuminated by the glory of the Lord. The shepherds feared as they beheld this glorious sight, but the angel was there to reassure and comfort them. The tidings that the angel brought were not tidings of fear; they were tidings of great joy: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). Though addressed to the shepherds, the tidings were intended for the whole world for all people. Thus has God ordained. He tells the few, then commissions them to go and tell what they have seen and heard.

A Wonderful Night

Surely it was a wonderful night for the world, that first Christmas night when Jesus was born! God's angels must have realised the import of that night; for as soon as the good tidings were made known, a whole multitude of the heavenly Host joined in the exultation. Their praises rang out in one accord with what the angel had already declared: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14).

The shepherds did not doubt the wondrous declaration, for they saw the attendant glory. After the angels returned to Heaven, the shepherds said one to another, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us." They came to the city with haste and found Mary, and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger, just as the angel of the Lord had said. This humble scene did not daunt their faith in the least degree: "When they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds." Oh, that men would be as willing to see Jesus today, as were these shepherds, and then would go out into the world to declare the vision they have beheld!

The City of David

Jesus was born in the City of Bethlehem, as the prophet had declared nearly 700 years previous to the event. Bethlehem was the birthplace of King David, too, and later became known as the City of David. It was here that David lived and tended his father's sheep before he was advanced to the kingship of Israel. How fitting that Jesus, the Son of David according to lineage, should be born in this same city to become the Great Shepherd of all God's sheep, and the coming King of all the redeemed. The name Bethlehem signifies "The house of bread." Does not this seem the proper place for Him to be born — who is the "living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:51)?

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a woman of Nazareth, a city of Galilee far to the north of Bethlehem. How could it be, then, that Jesus was born at Bethlehem? It seems that God put the whole world into motion to bring His prophecy to fulfilment. A decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed, every one in his own city. Joseph and Mary left Nazareth to go to Bethlehem (because he was of the house and lineage of David), "to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife." The Lord thus

came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

¹⁰ And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

¹² And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

¹⁵ And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

¹⁶ And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

¹⁷ And when they had seen *it*, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

¹⁸ And all they that heard *it* wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

¹⁹ But Mary kept all these things, and pondered *them* in her heart.

²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

proved beyond a chance of question that Jesus was of the house and lineage of David, as the Scripture said that He would be.

Simeon and Anna

The shepherds were the first to hear and see the glorious things concerning Christ. Forty days later in the Temple, Simeon and Anna spoke by the Spirit, to all who would heed, of the salvation and redemption of God that was manifest in this Child. One would think that these declarations would have aroused at least some of the inhabitants of Jerusalem to a perception of what was before them; but apparently nothing could stir these people, for when the wise men arrived, none of the people seemed to be aware of Jesus' birth.

The Wise Men's Visit

Some time had elapsed after Jesus' birth, before the wise men from the East came to Jerusalem seeking for the King. They saw the Star of Bethlehem the same night that Jesus was born, and without doubt they started on their journey to Him as soon as they could. They seemed to know what the star meant, possibly as the result of Balaam's prophecy to the king of Moab more than 1,400 years before, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel" (Numbers 24:17).

That the wise men were Gentiles and not of the commonwealth of Israel appears to be sure. They lived a great distance from the scene of the nativity and could have said, "If such a Prince and Saviour be born, we shall hear of Him shortly in our own country, and it will be time enough then to pay homage to Him." But the wise men had no thought of waiting to see Jesus, for they were so eager to honour Him that they took the long journey to the land of Israel to see the King and present their gifts to Him.

Following the Star

Well may these men be counted wise. They saw Jesus' star, and they arose and followed it to its source. Those who really desire to find Jesus and know Him, will not idly wait until Jesus passes by, but will arise and seek for Him. Those who earnestly seek for the King of Glory will find the Light to lead them to their destination.

No doubt the wise men expected to find all Jerusalem worshipping their newborn King, but the question they asked, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" caused Herod to be troubled and all Jerusalem with him. Herod called the chief priests and scribes to demand of them where Christ should be born. The chief priests and scribes were quick to furnish the answer, for they knew the prophecy of Micah: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel: whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).

The chief priests and scribes had studied God's Word all their lives and perhaps had memorised a great portion of it; still they failed to recognise their day of Christ's visitation; therefore all their efforts and hopes toward heavenly things were lost. "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (II Corinthians 3:6). A mental knowledge of God's Word will never save anyone. The Word must be written in the heart as well, and that is what Christ came to do.

Going to Bethlehem

Herod sent the wise men to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also." The star, which they saw in the East reappeared, and they

followed it to the place where the young Child lay. "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11).

The wise men did not return to Jerusalem as Herod had directed them to do, for God warned them in a dream to return to their country another way. When the men had departed, the Lord appeared to Joseph in another dream and said: "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him" (Matthew 2:13). Herod had no thought of worshiping Jesus; he thought only of slaying the Son of God because the wise men had declared that He was the King of the Jews.

Jesus of Nazareth

After the death of Herod, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, in Egypt, to say that it was safe for the Holy Family to return to Israel. Joseph feared to go into Judæa, however, for Archelaus, the son of Herod, reigned there. Being further directed of God, they made their way into Galilee, and came to the City of Nazareth.

Jesus of Nazareth became the stumbling stone of the Jewish people, for they said, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). The answer is, "Come and see." You must see Jesus to appreciate Him; you must know Jesus to love Him. Those who know and love Him have the greatest treasures in the world, and they have the promise of the life that is to come.

**"When the lowly Nazarene
To my rescue quickly came,
Filled my heart with sweetest peace,
Day had broken, night was gone."**

QUESTIONS

1. Who was the first to declare the good tidings of Jesus' birth? Who were the first to hear the tidings?
2. Where was the Son of God lying when the shepherds came to Him? Could not a better place be found for Jesus?
3. In what city was Jesus born? Tell how this came about.
4. What does the name "Bethlehem" signify?
5. Who were the wise men? Were they of the Children of Israel?
6. How did they happen to come to Jerusalem?
7. Why did Joseph take the Holy Family into Egypt?
8. To what city in Israel did they go after they returned from Egypt?
9. What is the greatest Christmas gift that has ever been given?