

The
Christmas
Story



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The angel Gabriel comes to Mary — Luke 1:26–38 (NIV)

Long ago, approximately 2,000 years, when King Herod ruled Israel, God sent the angel Gabriel to a young woman named Mary who lived in the town of Nazareth and was engaged to marry a carpenter by the name of Joseph. The angel Gabriel said to Mary:

“Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

Mary was very surprised by this and wondered what the angel meant. The angel said to her:

“Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

Mary was afraid, but she trusted God. She replied to the angel:

“I am the Lord’s servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.”

Gabriel also told Mary that her cousin Elizabeth, who everyone thought was too old to have children, would have a baby boy who God had chosen to prepare the way for Jesus. Then the angel left her.

Mary visits Elizabeth — Luke 1:35–45 (NIV)

Mary said goodbye to her family and friends and went to visit her cousin Elizabeth and Zechariah, Elizabeth’s husband. Elizabeth was very happy to see Mary. She knew that Mary had been chosen by God to be the mother of his son. An angel had already told Zechariah that Elizabeth’s baby would prepare people to welcome Jesus. He was to be called John. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for several months and then returned home to Nazareth.

Joseph accepts Jesus as his son — Matthew 1:18–25 (NIV)

Joseph was worried when he found out that Mary was expecting a baby before their marriage had taken place. He wondered if he should put off the wedding altogether. Then an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said:

“Don’t be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”

The angel explained that Mary had been chosen by God to be the mother of his son and told Joseph that the baby would be named Jesus, which means “Savior” because he would save people. When Joseph woke up, he made the decision to take Mary as his wife.

Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem — Luke 2:2–7 (NIV)

At this time, the land where Mary and Joseph lived was part of the Roman Empire. The Roman Emperor Augustus wanted a list of all the people in the empire, to make sure they paid their taxes. He ordered everyone to return to the town where their families originally came from and enter their names in a register there. Mary and Joseph traveled over 70 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem, because that is where Joseph's family came from. Most people walked, but some lucky people had a donkey to help carry the goods needed for the journey. Joseph and Mary traveled very slowly because Mary's baby was due to be born soon.

Mary gives birth to Jesus — Luke 2:4–7 (NIV)

When they reached Bethlehem, they had problems finding somewhere to stay. Because so many people had come to register their names in the census, every house was full and every bed was taken. The only option they had was to stay with the animals. People often kept animals in the lower level of the house, especially at night, to help keep the house warm from their body heat.

So, in the place where the animals slept, Mary gave birth to Jesus, the son of God. Upon the birth of Jesus, Mary wrapped him in a long "swaddling" cloth and laid him in a manger, a tub that the animals ate their hay from.

Angels appeared to the shepherds — Luke 2:8–20 (NIV)

In the hills and fields outside Bethlehem, shepherds looked after their sheep through the long night. As the new day began, suddenly an angel appeared before them, and the glory of God shone around them. The shepherds were scared, but the angel said:

"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Then many more angels appeared, lighting up the sky. The shepherds heard them praising God saying:

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had gone, the shepherds went to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph. The baby Jesus was lying in a manger as they had been told. When they saw him, they told everyone what the angel had said and everyone who heard the story were astonished. Then the shepherds returned to their sheep, praising God for sending his son to be their Savior.

A bright star appeared in the sky — Matthew 2:1–8 (NIV)

When Jesus was born, a brand-new bright star appeared in the sky. Some scholars who would be known as the Wise Men from different countries saw the star and understood what it meant. They were knowledgeable men that studied the stars and had read in very old writings that a new star would appear when a great king was born. They set out to find the new king and bring him gifts.

The Wise Men followed the star toward the country of Judea, and when they got to the capital called Jerusalem, they began to ask people:

“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

Herod, the king of Judea, heard this and it made him very angry to think that someone might take his place as king. Herod sent for the Wise Men to come to him. He told them to keep following the star until they had found the baby king. He said:

“Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

But Herod did not tell them that he really had a plan in mind to kill the new king.

The Wise Men worship Jesus — Matthew 2:9–15 (NIV)

The Wise Men continued to follow the bright star toward Bethlehem. Beams of light from the star seemed to shine directly down upon the place where Jesus was.

The Wise Men entered the house and found Jesus with Mary. They bowed down and worshipped him and then spread the gifts they had brought before Jesus — gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The Wise Men were warned in a dream, by God, not to go back to Herod. So, they returned home to their countries by a different route.

When the Wise Men had gone, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. The angel said:

“Get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

Joseph got up, took Jesus and Mary, and during the night, they left for Egypt, where he stayed until Herod died. Upon the death of Herod, Joseph had another dream in which an angel appeared to him. The angel said:

“Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

Mary, Joseph, and Jesus go to Nazareth — Matthew 2:19–23 (NIV)

Trusting the message from the angel, Joseph took Jesus and Mary back to Israel. However, upon hearing that Herod’s son was now king of Judea, he decided to go to Galilee, and they lived in their old town of Nazareth. ♦

Family Christmas Prayer

Dear Lord, please help me and my family to remember the true meaning of Christmas — the celebration of your son’s birth. I ask that you help us remember what Jesus’ birth and life truly mean this holiday season.

Thank you, Lord, for your faithfulness and love and for all we have in our lives. We are especially grateful at this time of year, as we reflect on your provision, all you have given us, and the love you have placed in our lives. Thank you for your love and guidance.

In the name of your son Jesus, we pray, amen.



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