

Thank you to everyone who participated in bringing the greatest story ever told to life right before our eyes. You did a great job. It's a simple story really. It's about a baby being born and all the people that come to visit that baby.

OK maybe it's not so simple after all. To begin with both Mary and Joseph heard from angels about this baby which meant that God had something special for this baby to do.

Next, the baby isn't born at home or in a hospital – well babies weren't born in hospitals in those days but this baby wasn't born at home, this baby was born in a stable because Mary and Joseph couldn't find any space at an inn; it's not like you could call ahead to make reservations; that's why they ended up in a stable. The inns were crowded because all kinds of people were traveling in order to obey the command by the emperor that everyone had to go to their own city to be counted. That may seem silly to us but in the days before computers, or telephones, or mail service, it was kind of hard to keep track of people.

In those days when you traveled by land you either walked or rode. Rich people could ride in a carriage but Mary and Joseph were not rich people. They had a donkey but it's hard to ride a donkey when you are nine months pregnant so Mary probably walked most of the way and she would have been glad to find any place to rest. Baby Jesus didn't know any different and the donkey was probably glad to be standing still.

It's not like the usual kinds of people come to visit the baby either. There were no grandparents, or friends, or aunts and uncles. No, instead there are shepherds and wise men. Shepherds spend a lot of time outside looking after their sheep. They have to keep their sheep from wandering and protect them from wolves and people who would try to steal them. They were kind of tough and didn't get to wash very often so they weren't considered very nice people. But God thought that the shepherds were important enough to send an angel to talk to them and these shepherds would tell Mary what the angel said and they would spread the news of Jesus birth to anyone they met. Those shepherds remind us that Jesus would reach out to just about anyone who didn't fit in: people who were sick, people who were poor, and people who were criminals, everyone was important to Jesus.

The wise men came from far away. They might be like political commentators or journalists today. They were interested in everything. But unlike the news that we hear today they got their news from the stars and they believed that the stars could tell them things about what was going to happen. We don't look at the stars that way today but it was the stars that brought them to the Christ child so they must have been doing something right. They were also foreigners so they didn't know the prophecies about the Messiah who was supposed to be born to save the Jewish people, they'd just heard about a new king. Those wise men remind us that Jesus was not going to be just for Jewish people but for everyone all over the world and that when we receive a sign from God it's a good thing to pay attention!

Still, it's the baby who is most important because that was no ordinary baby that was born on this night so long ago it was the Christ child. This baby was the Son of God. The prophet Isaiah said he would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Those are big titles for a little baby. This baby came to help us have a better relationship with God his father. This baby would grow up to make his father's kingdom real but he himself

would be a different kind of king. Jesus would never command an army, he would never be rich or live in a palace, instead he would use his power to heal the sick, to give courage to people who were being bullied, and to give hope to people who were sad. This king promised that when we ask God for forgiveness after we have done something bad we would be forgiven, which is a great relief since sometimes it is hard to be good.

Tonight is the night we have come again to Bethlehem, we have come with the shepherds and we have come with the wise men and we have sung with the angels "Glory to the newborn king". And tonight is the night we rejoice in the birth of a baby and go out into the world singing "Joy to the world the lord is come!"

Remember to sing loudly.

Merry Christmas!

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