

THE
CHARACTERS
OF
CHRISTMAS

Who were the real people of the
Christmas story?



TABLE OF CONTENT

Introduction - 3



Zecharaiah - 6



Elizabeth - 11



King Herod - 14



The Shepherds - 17



Mary - 20



The Wise Men - 24



Joseph - 27



Conclusion - 30





INTRODUCTION



Jesus' birth sparked a significant transition in God's great plan for humanity. Born to his parents in humble condition, the miraculous story of his birth has been passed down since ancient days. This child is the Son of God, conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. His birth set God's redemptive plan for humanity in motion.



This nativity scene is the serene scene we often see on Christmas cards. On that day, a young teenage girl pregnant out of wedlock, with her betrothed, 100 miles from home, staying with a stranger, gave birth to God's son. Jesus entered when King Herod was on the throne. Tyrannical and paranoid, Herod demanded that all baby boys under two be killed shortly after the Wise Men asked to see the new King. From the very beginning, Christ's earthly life was marked by miracles and fulfilled prophecy, as only God Himself could arrange.

The Jews were under Roman rule, and they had long awaited a Messiah to rescue them. None of the Jews expected this Messiah to come as a baby in a manger. They thought this warrior would be strong, advanced, and attack. But Jesus didn't come to break Roman rule. He would shatter Satan's cursed hold on humanity.



When the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir." -Galatians 4:4-7 NLT



After 400 years of prophetic silence, God sent His son. Jesus arrived on earth with one purpose: to live, sacrificially die, and rise again so that we may be able to receive adoption into the family of God. In doing so, Jesus repaired all the damage done in Genesis during the fall of Adam and Eve. Jesus is our second Adam, the one who would be spotless, sinless, righteous, and die in our place.

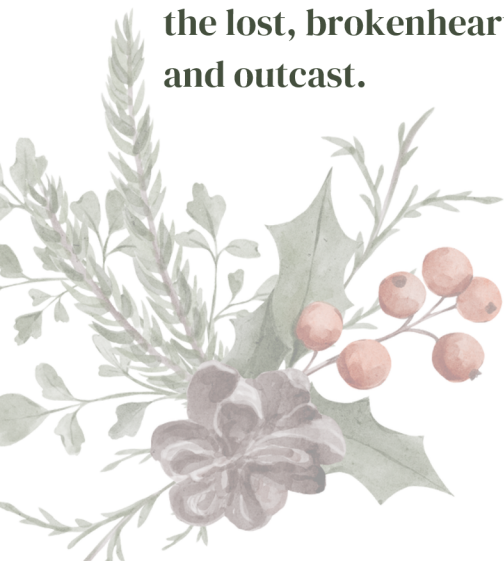
Jesus was surrounded by animals at his birth. Mary, a young woman, was chosen by God to bring him into the world in humble circumstances, visited by lowly shepherds and astrologers.

The nativity story placed unexpected people in crucial roles, revealing most profoundly the very heart of God. Jesus came to seek those looking for him, but to save the lost, brokenhearted, overlooked and outcast.

As we track and trace the prophecies fulfilled as Christ arrived among us, Christmas reminds us of Jesus' presence throughout all of the scriptures. Jesus is the Son of God. Genesis 1 mentions Jesus in acknowledging that God said, "Let us make mankind in our image." Both Jesus and the Holy Spirit were present with God.

Jesus' life on earth fulfilled over 300 prophecies. Jesus is called 'Immanuel' because He is 'God with us.' The tiny babe who grew up and walked alongside us still sympathizes with us in our weakness. He knew earthly joy, happiness, love, grief, anger, and confusion with a heavenly perspective and untainted by sin (2 Cor 5:21). He set an example for us to live by and paved the path for us to follow Him.

No matter what we face today, the person of Jesus is still able to understand our pain and weakness. He is still interceding for us at the right hand of Father God (Rom 8:34).





ZACHERIAH

Sometimes it feels like God doesn't hear our prayers, let alone answer them. We cry out to God, distracted and frustrated, waiting for an answer that fits our terms. God does hear our prayers. He answers, just not always in the time and way we want Him to.

The Book of Revelation tells us that in heaven, there are "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." (5:8) That means every single prayer you and I have ever prayed is collected and stored in a heavenly space. We see this beautifully about prayer portrayed in the Christmas story, specifically in the life of Zechariah, recorded in the Gospel of Luke.



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Remember Galatians 4:4-7

"But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir."



Zechariah belonged to the priestly division of Abijah. He and his wife, Elizabeth, descended from the line of Aaron (Moses' Brother). Luke tells us three specific things about them as a couple:

- 1. They were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the laws and commands.**
- 2. They were barren because Elizabeth was not able to conceive.**
- 3. They were very old.**

One day, Zechariah was chosen while casting lots to go into the temple to burn incense, as was customary. This was not a quiet affair. Worshippers would have gathered outside the temple to worship and pray as he was inside. The Jewish leaders taught that the smoke from the incense made the people's prayers rise to God. The altar of incense he was tending is described in Exodus 30.

Ancient culture assumed barren women held current or past sins, flaws, or hidden wrongs. For Elizabeth, this would have been torture and, no doubt, hard for Zechariah to watch. Yet, the first words from the angel's mouth were, "Your prayer has been answered." How wonderful to see Revelation 5:8 in action. Friend, it will never matter what prayer you pray, be it audible, silent, through gritted teeth, or tears, God hears it. He is busy answering your prayer. Sometimes instantly, but always in His perfect timing.



The Jews waited approximately 4,000 years for Jesus' birth. God knew, in the fullness of time, Jesus would come.

The same is true for Zechariah's prayer. He prayed, and in the fullness of time, God answered that prayer by sending forth a baby to be born of his wife's womb. God was opening Elizabeth's womb for a baby with a very special plan and purpose.

The angel told Zechariah:

Luke 1:16-17

“And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly.”

This baby, John the Baptist, would go before Jesus to prepare the way.

Zechariah was unsure and in disbelief, so Gabriel, the angel, told him he would not speak until the baby's birth. When Zechariah left the temple, those awaiting outside worship realized he had seen a vision but could not understand it. He completed his service at the temple and then went home to his wife, who became pregnant.

This couple, long past child-bearing years, witnessed a miracle. Their baby would be named John as the angel instructed. In Luke, chapter 1:40, we read a beautiful verse as Mary comes to see Elizabeth:

Luke 1:40

“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.”

What a marvelous moment between these two unexpectedly pregnant cousins.



After John was born, Luke wrote that Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

“Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people. He has sent us a mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David, just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago. Now we will be saved from our enemies and from all who hate us. He has been merciful to our ancestors by remembering his sacred covenant- the covenant he swore with an oath to our ancestor Abraham. We have been rescued from our enemies so we can serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness, for as long as we live.

“And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord. You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins. Because of God’s tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace.”

- Luke 1:68-79

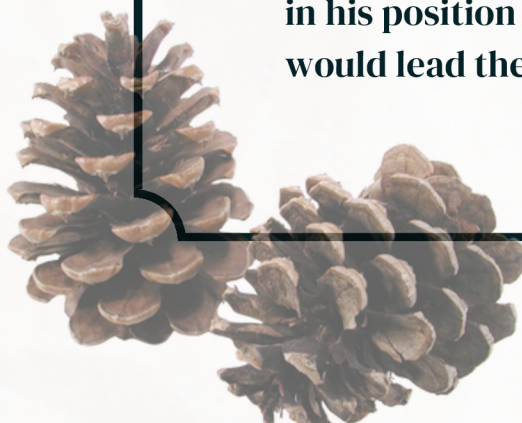




Fifteen years into the reign of Tiberius Caesar, God spoke to John the Baptist, and he began to preach a message of repentance, the forgiveness of sins, and started to baptize, fulfilling the prophecy from Isaiah 40:3-5:

“Listen! It’s the voice of someone shouting, ‘Clear the way through the wilderness for the Lord! Make a straight highway through the wasteland for our God! Fill in the valleys, and level the mountains and hills. Straighten the curves, and smooth out the rough places. Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. The Lord has spoken!’”

John was clear and confident in his position as the one who would lead the way.



Luke 3:16 records:

“John answered their questions by saying, ‘I baptize you with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.’”

God is always listening to our cries and hearing our prayers. He protects them, and at the right time, He will answer. Zechariah’s life reminds us that our God is the God of the impossible things.

This Christmas, think back over the prayers of the past and allow this little section of the Christmas story to build up faith and hope that one day God will answer you and you will see the goodness of God in the land of the living!



ELIZABETH

In ancient times, women were considered insignificant in comparison to men and expected to become mothers. When the Bible zooms in on a woman's story, it's significant.

Elizabeth, the Mother of John the Baptist, is mentioned only in the Gospel of Luke. Here, Luke tells us that Elizabeth was “righteous in the sight of God, observed all the commands, and decreed blamelessly” (Luke 1:6), but she was barren.

In those times, to be barren or struggle with infertility was considered sinful. Barrenness was seen by society as a sign of God's punishment for the woman and her family for an obvious or hidden sin. Yet Luke wrote that this was not true of Elizabeth. She was “righteous”. Society labeled her one way, but God called her “righteous.”

Elizabeth, in Hebrew, means “God’s promise,” “God is my oath,” or “My God is Bountiful.”

We already know the backstory of Zechariah and Elizabeth from the previous chapter. Though barren in their later years, the angel spoke to Zechariah and announced the coming birth of John the Baptist, whom they would conceive. Typically, when an angel appears to a human in the Bible, their greeting includes, “Don’t be afraid!” The majestic presence of an angel in the presence of people strikes a holy fear into most!

In the hill country where they resided, Elizabeth awaited the return of her husband, unaware of his angel encounter. Barren, scorned, and outcast by society, Zechariah would soon deliver a message that would change the course of their lives.





“The Lord has done this for me. In these days, he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.”

- Luke 1:25



Elizabeth’s prayers compiled over the years. Almighty God chose to include her in his plans. As Psalm 8 says, “What is mankind that you are mindful of them?” yet God is mindful of us. If it matters to us, it matters to Him. He is always working and always moving.

In an instant, Elizabeth’s life changed. The joyous news of John, to be born to her, and to prepare the way for Jesus. She had never been forgotten and was not barren as a result of sin. Elizabeth was loved and remembered by the Holy God she loved and served.

The Lord had a great purpose for Elizabeth’s life and a plan to fulfill it. The same is true for our lives! Each of us has been created with a specific purpose we alone can live out on this earth to the glory of God.

As Mary comes to see Elizabeth, Luke tells us: “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Luke 1:40)

What a marvelous moment between these two unexpectedly pregnant cousins. One was long past childbearing age, and the other was young and unwed, yet God used them both. No age limit or barrier exists in the kingdom; God will use whoever is willing and all things for good.

The story of Elizabeth, like that of Zachariah, reminds us that God is always listening to our prayers, even when it seems like these prayers will never be answered. Elizabeth had long stopped hoping for a child; that pang just became a hollow pain that lived in her empty womb. But God used that space to further His kingdom.

Elizabeth also teaches us that when our prayers are not answered as we hope, we should still follow God and live righteous and blameless lives, honoring God and following his commandments.

So maybe you are waiting for something this Christmas that doesn't fit under the tree. There are so many prayers we can pray to God, and some of us, like Elizabeth and Zechariah, have long stopped praying, but God heard those prayers, and they are, as Revelation 5:8 says, in golden bowls of incense, waiting for the right time for God to move or act.

Trust God's timing, as frustrating as it may be, and lean on Him to do what is right in the meantime.





KING HEROD

Every good story has a villain—a bad guy out to thwart good and encourage evil. In the account of Christ’s birth on earth, that villain is King Herod. The Gospel of Luke mentions him when Elizabeth’s pregnancy is revealed, but more commonly, we read of him in the Gospel of Matthew as the Magi visiting the Christ child. The wise men approached the place expecting to meet the new baby king, and they met King Herod. Matthew 2 says,

“Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.” – Matthew 2:2

This deeply disturbed the paranoid king, and he responded,

“Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!” – Matthew 2:8



The Magi did as they were asked and finally found Jesus in a manger in Bethlehem, where they worshiped Him.

While they were with Jesus, they were guided a different way home in a dream. Herod had been outwitted and furious, using his authority and power to demand that all baby boys under the age of two be killed as far as Bethlehem and the surrounding areas.

Herod was not a man of calm, peaceful means, but a tyrannical Roman king. He lived from 72 BC to 4 BC, remembered for constructing colossal buildings throughout Judea, including the building of the second Temple. Herod was blessed to have a father who had great relations with Julius Caesar, so that he could rise to power. But Herod's insecurity and mental instability worsened as he got older, and he murdered his wife, Mariamne, her two sons, her brother, her grandfather, and her mother.

From Genesis to Revelation, we read of many villains and enemies of the Israelites who come to ruin

God's beautiful creation and cause havoc in the lives of those who love God. They even seek to keep those who do not yet know God from discovering who He is and how much they are loved.

In the Christmas story, we see the evil in Herod. But in Esther's story, we read that it is Haman.

Even in the beginning, we see Cain kill Abel. What lies behind this repetitive evil?

Before humanity was created in the heavens, the chief worshiping angel decided to rebel against God and was thrown out of Heaven along with the fallen angels. This angel is now known as Satan or Lucifer. (Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28.) Satan became God's adversary.



Genesis 3 records what is commonly known as ‘the fall.’ It is the moment God's stunning and perfect, sinless creation is thrown into disarray when the serpent (or Satan) tempts Eve to eat fruit from the Tree of Knowledge that God had forbidden. Adam and Eve disregarded the only boundary God had given them.

The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day, he asked the woman,

“Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?”- Genesis 3:1

Though Adam and Eve succumbed to doubt and rebellion, cursing humanity forevermore, God’s plan of redemption was also set in motion. Genesis 3:15 records God saying to Satan,

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

This is a foretelling of Jesus' death on the cross.

Jesus' birth in the Christmas story is God’s redemptive plan in motion, the greatest story ever told, driven by God’s love for us.

No modern enemy can snatch a saved soul that accepts Jesus as their savior from God’s hand. We need not fear the works of Satan and his demons, but rather, we can delight in the love that God has for us and look forward to a glorious day when we are reunited in heaven.

One day, God will bind Satan forever, but until then, we can rest in the saving and life-changing work of Jesus on the cross.

The same devil working through Herod could not kill Jesus, and the same devil working through Pontius Pilate could not defeat Jesus. Even the grave could not hold Him.

THE SHEPHERDS



The Bible references two sets of strangers who come from afar to worship the Christ child in what we know as the nativity scene.

A group of shepherds was visited by angels, who set them on a path to see the newborn King. The apostle Luke recorded the encounter:

That night, shepherds were staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."— Luke 2:8-12



Like everyone else in the Jewish community, the Shepherds knew of the prophesied Messiah. Stories of what God did in the history of their people were passed down by oral tradition. They would have expected the Messiah to come one day and overthrow Roman rule. Witnessing the angels, fearful, curious, and surprised.





Notice the direct connection between Jesus' incarnate birth being told to shepherds and Psalm 23

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” –
Psalm 23:1



Shepherds lived and worked in a profession the Jews looked down upon. They were unwelcome outcasts of low social status, similar to that of a tax collector or a Leper. These men were deemed so unworthy that they would not have been permitted to give testimony in a Jewish court due to perceived unreliability, even if they saw a crime firsthand.

They, as shepherds, were considered ceremonially unclean, and as a result, were not permitted to go into the temple to worship or pray -despite being the very people who raised the animals for holy sacrifices.

Four hundred years of prophetic silence had passed from the book of Malachi to the birth of the Messiah. Yet when the time came to herald the good news, it was done by angelic beings to shepherds.

Jesus called Himself the good Shepherd.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me.” John 10:14



Jesus' birth began the earthly life we now reference as the example to live by, and the road to His sacrificial death to rescue us from sin

Jesus' death would erase the need for shepherds to raise animals to sacrifice at the Temple.

The story of the shepherds reminds us that despite our sins, we are welcome, too. No one is left out. Jesus' birth was not only for the rich, elite, or perfect, but for all of humanity. All are welcome to follow Jesus, to come and worship. In Jesus, we find life, guidance, and love. We are cared for by a Great Shepherd who gives us all we need.

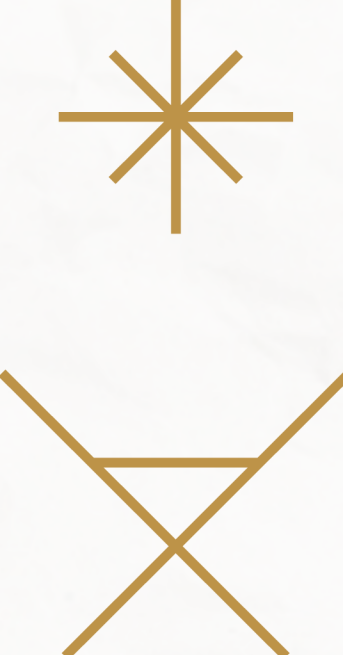
Hebrews 10:12-14

“But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God’s right hand. There he waits until his enemies are humbled and made a footstool under his feet. For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.”

The shepherds found more than they could have ever imagined the night Christ was born. If we set aside our fear, anxiety, worry, questions, and circumstances and just ran to Jesus, what would we find?

Respond as the shepherds did: run to Jesus, and when you find Him, worship Him there!





MARY

In Genesis, we read God's response to the sin of Adam and Eve, and there, we see that a plan of restoration is declared. Enmity is placed between the woman and the serpent (Satan), and from her offspring would come the Messiah. He would crush the head of the serpent and would make space to redeem humanity once and for all (Genesis 3). All through time, every Jewish woman was told of this story in oral tradition, and every Jewish woman and girl wondered excitedly who would be the chosen one. Whose womb would be opened to carry the one and only Messiah?



The pages of the gospels reveal the woman selected for this special and incredible moment. Mary was probably around 13 years of age when an angel visited her. This angelic visit was a profound moment that would change Mary's life forever. Betrothed to Joseph and living in Nazareth, Galilee, an angel of the Lord named Gabriel approached her. The angel's opening words tell us everything we need to understand about why God chose Mary. He said, Gabriel appeared to her and said,

"Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!" -Luke 1:28



Mary responded,
“I am the Lord’s servant.
May everything you have
said about me come
true.” And then the angel
left her. -Luke 1:38

Mary was chosen, favored, and God's hand was upon her.

Understandably, Mary was troubled by the words and wondered what the message was. The angel told her she would conceive a son by the Holy Spirit, despite being unwed and a virgin. This caused Mary to wonder how all of this would take place. But unlike the story we read of Zechariah, who responds in disbelief, Mary replies with faith in her heart, trusting it to be possible but wondering about the details of how this would happen. Mary’s circumstances fulfilled prophecy:

*“All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’).”
- Isaiah 7:14*

To be pregnant outside of marriage left Joseph with a decision to make: did he trust this was the act of the Holy God? Or did he believe Mary was unfaithful to him? To be pregnant by another man while betrothed was adultery, and Mary could have been divorced because of this, leaving her alone to fight and fend for herself in a culture that looked down on women, which would not have been easy. Thankfully, Joseph was also visited by an angel, and in response, took Mary into his home. Due to his and Mary’s willingness to trust God, they were protected.



Mary teaches us a valuable life lesson here: we can hear God's words, and sometimes the result is that we are confused by them. But if we still have faith in our hearts to believe He can do the impossible, we can take those questions to God and trust Him to answer us, just as is said in Jeremiah 33:3. Having questions is not a sin before God. He is almighty, and He can handle our questions, whether they are easy or hard.

The Bible reveals Mary to us as a woman of faith and strength. A woman was willing to follow God wherever he leads and to do so despite the shame, pain, gossip, and hurt that could come. She trusted God would protect her. In the story of the bible, we see Mary go to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was about 100 miles away. There in Ein Karem, they spend time together as they protected their children, John the Baptist in the womb of Elizabeth and Jesus in the womb of Mary. It must have been such a special little bubble for them to share these holy and amazing experiences with each other, when very few others would have understood them.





Once Mary was home, during the reign of Ceasar Agustus, a census was called. Joseph had to take his new wife to his hometown to be registered. So, they left Nazareth and headed to Judea, Bethlehem, the City of David. At this point, Mary was at minimum 4 or 5 months pregnant after spending three months with Elizabeth. They traveled, Joseph on foot and Mary via donkey, the 80-mile journey.

While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for Jesus to be born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him safely in a manger. Shepherds come to visit Jesus, worshipping Him with a story of angelic visitation. The wise men came all the way from the East, likely Persia, with their caravans of people and in possession of poignant gifts to worship Jesus.

“But Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often.”
-Luke 2:19

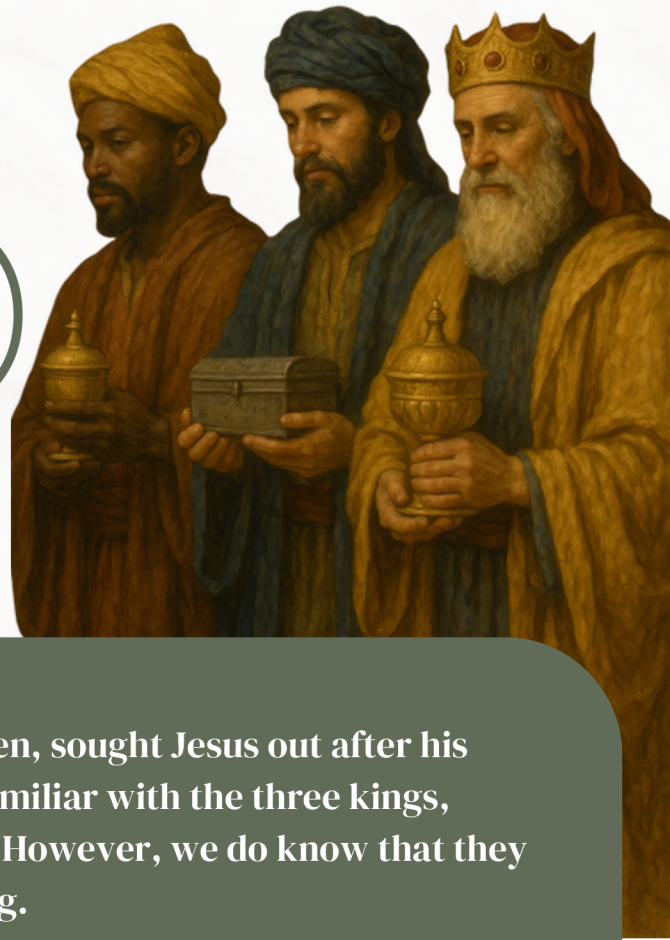
Mary intentionally stored these moments up. One day, these memories would hold her faith when as her son carried the cross.

Mary had more children over time. Jesus had brothers and sisters: James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon, but his sisters names are not mentioned in the Bible (Mark 6:3).

Mary set an example of following God, even into unknown waters, with great faith and trust. As we look at the life of the mother of Jesus, the woman chosen to carry and mother the Messiah, would be willing to follow God into unknown, dangerous, and impossible places? Would we be people of faith like Mary or doubt like Zechariah?



THE WISE MEN



The Magi, more commonly known as the Wise Men, sought Jesus out after his birth to bring him gifts. Though most of us are familiar with the three kings, Scripture doesn't actually support that number. However, we do know that they brought three gifts to celebrate the newborn King.

“Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.” - Matthew 2:2

These Kings came from the East. There is no mention in scripture of them being kings, but they obviously held positions with weight for Herod to agree to see them. Some even think these men were Jewish, but given that they came from afar, likely they were Gentile.

“Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem.”

– Matthew 2:1



The Gospel of Matthew recorded Herod's rule that all the boys under two were to be killed, which tells us it took the Magi over a year to reach Bethlehem. Jesus was likely toddling around as a small one—or two-year-old boy by the time they visited.

The Wise Men brought three gifts: frankincense, gold, and myrrh. Whether they realized it or not, these gifts carried specific meanings that would speak to who Jesus would be in his adult life. These were the gifts given to royalty or used in the temple by the priesthood. While they were collectively special, they also each held specific meanings.

The gift of gold was a purified gold which had been heated and reheated to take out impurities and scum. The purest gold to represent Jesus' kingship.

Frankincense is a resin still used in many parts of the world. It is obtained by scraping the bark of certain native trees and is, once dried, burned. Frankincense was traditionally burned in the temple as an offering to God (Leviticus 2:2). This gift affirmed Jesus as both God and man; it recognized his humanity but honored Jesus' deity as God. Exodus 30 talks about pure frankincense in verse thirty-four and how it was to be consecrated as pure and holy. Yet we also know that Jesus' life was a pure and holy offering to God so that we could see the forgiveness of sins.



Myrrh is a fragrant spice from trees, not the bark like frankincense, but the sap. It is used for many things, including perfume, oil, and medicine, but it is also commonly used to prepare bodies for burial, and that was no different in the Jewish culture 2000 years ago. Again, there is a direct Old Testament and temple connection here, as Exodus 30 tells us myrrh was used as a main ingredient in the anointing oil used in the temple, at the altar, and to prepare the priests and their instruments.

“As I live, says the Lord,
every knee will bow to
me, and every tongue
will confess to God.”

- Romans 14:11

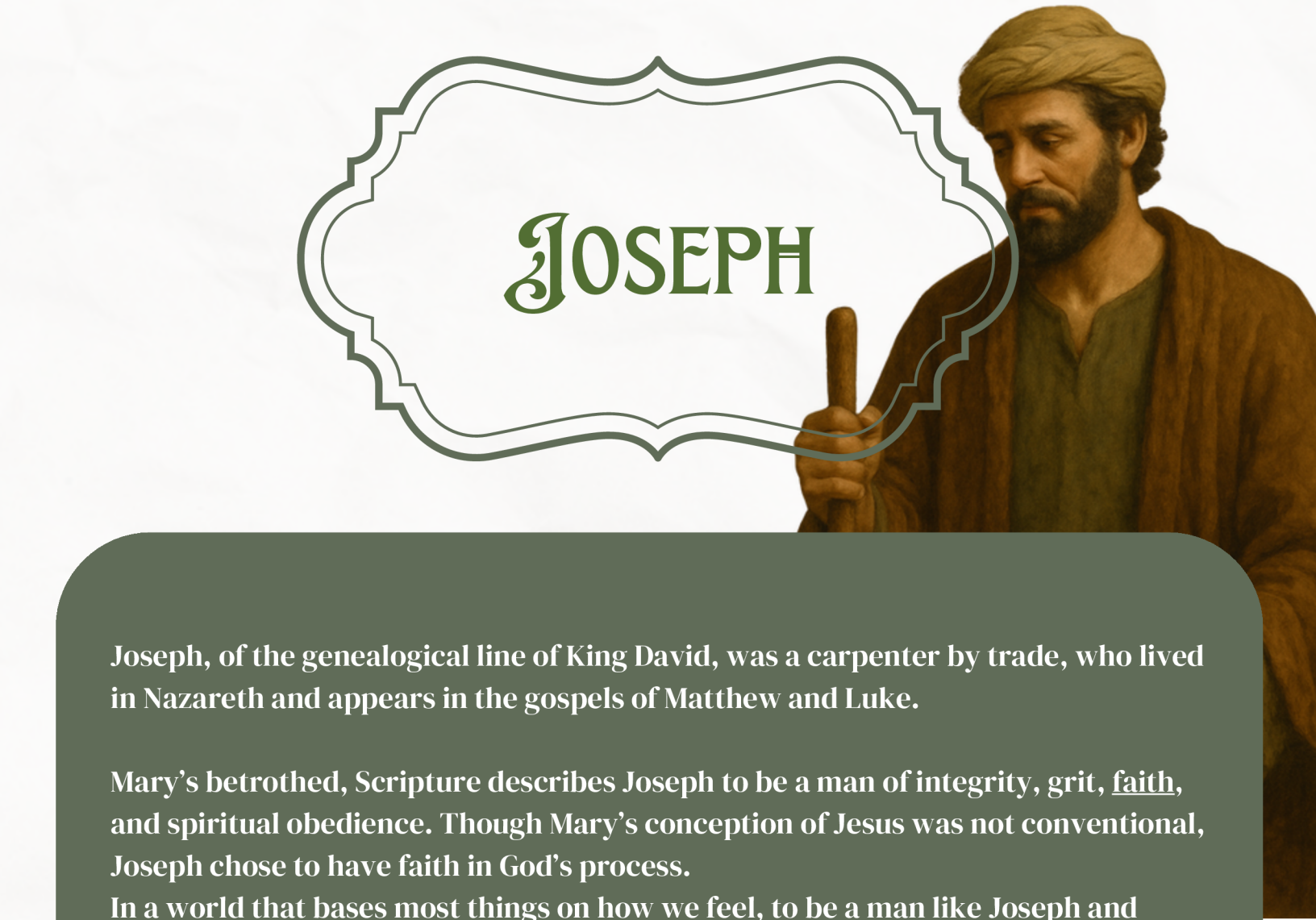
It is not a coincidence that Jesus lived a pure and holy life, and these gifts sent a nod in the same direction. Likely, it was brought as a foreshadowing of Jesus' death on the cross and burial. John, Chapter 19, shows a moment when Nicodemus brought myrrh for Jesus' burial.

The Magi remind us that, whether shepherds or prominent people in society, all are welcome to worship the King.

The Magi were given the option to give Jesus up to Herod or go another way home. They chose to protect Jesus and go another way home.

I suppose the question we must ask ourselves is, what will we do with our knowledge of Jesus? Will we worship Him this Christmas or make it all about other things?





JOSEPH

Joseph, of the genealogical line of King David, was a carpenter by trade, who lived in Nazareth and appears in the gospels of Matthew and Luke.

Mary's betrothed, Scripture describes Joseph to be a man of integrity, grit, faith, and spiritual obedience. Though Mary's conception of Jesus was not conventional, Joseph chose to have faith in God's process.

In a world that bases most things on how we feel, to be a man like Joseph and think it through is of great importance.

As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream.



“Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

– Matthew 1:20



“Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival.” Luke 2:41

To fulfill a prophecy that the Messiah would come from Judah and the line of David (Jeremiah 33), it mattered that Joseph was legally Jesus’ father on earth. But furthermore, Jesus would be alive for 33 years, moving, living, breathing, and being. In that time, He needed an earthly father figure who would be a man of integrity, faith, and consistency.

All those qualities are revealed in Joseph. We see integrity in how he handled Mary’s pregnancy pre-marriage. We see his faith in his willingness to follow the angels’ commands without doubt, and we see his consistency when scripture says, “Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival.” (Luke 2:41)

Like any young man, Jesus needed a strong father figure in his home to follow, learn from, be taught by, be protected by, and look up to, and Joseph provided this kind of home for Jesus to learn and grow in.



Joseph was a steady man who, despite having no recorded words in scripture, is depicted as a man of integrity and faith.

He was willing to do whatever God asked of him, even if it went against the societal grain, his emotions, the law, and even logic!

When God speaks, the faithful listen and respond. Most scholars suggest Joseph had died before Jesus died on the cross.

Remembering Joseph's integrity inspires us to be diligent followers of Jesus in our daily disciplines of prayer and reading God's Word.

A Prayer for Courage and Integrity

*Father,
Thank you for the stories of the characters
of Christmas. The way you weave all of
your people together for your purposes is
nothing short of miraculous. But that's
who you are ...the God of miracles. Help us
to become great people of faith, operating
with honor, courage, and integrity. We
want our lives to bring glory to you, God,
as we live out our earthly page of your
story.
In Jesus' Name,
Amen.*





CONCLUSION

This study has been a wonderful reminder of the incredible characters surrounding the amazing story of Christ's birth on earth. But if you don't know Jesus and are curious, consider attending a Christmas service. Reach out to God in faith, and allow receive the greatest gift. We are all loved by God.

“God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten son, that whosoever might believe in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.”
- John 3:16

We don't need to be fixed or changed to come into the presence of God. Romans says,

“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (5:8).

As the characters of Christmas demonstrate, all are welcome to participate in God's great story of redemption and grace. This babe we celebrate at Christmas is the key to abundance. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.





NOTES



This compilation was inspired by the Characters of Christmas Series on Christianity.com, written by Michelle Treacy, with additions by Meg Bucher, Editor and Digital Content Creator for Christianity.com. Michelle Treacy is a Christian writer, a wife to Gerald, and a busy mother of three: Emily, Ava Rose, and Matthew. Finding time to write is not always easy. However, Michelle's desire to write about Jesus and her passion to teach are what motivate her. Michelle writes on Instagram, Thoughts From My Bible, and WordPress at Thoughts From My Bible. If you meet her in person, you will likely find her with two things in hand, a good Christian book and a cup of tea!

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