

Purpose

- To introduce John the Baptist
- To begin our study of Jesus, starting with his birth.

Materials

- Bibles –

Background Information

JOHN THE BAPTIST

We talked last week that the four gospels run parallel in telling us the story of Jesus. It however, is interesting that only Luke tells us anything about John the Baptist until he reaches maturity and begins his ministry. But in Luke we hear more about the life of John the Baptist. Zechariah, a priest, and his wife Elizabeth (a descendent of Aaron) were getting up in years and had not been able to have any children. One day Zechariah was the priest selected to go into the temple and burn the incense. When the time came to burn the incense he was alone in the temple while the others were out praying. Suddenly Gabriel, an angel of the Lord, appeared to Zechariah. Naturally Zechariah was scared. Gabriel tried to reassure him that he had come to tell him good news. When Gabriel told him that his prayers had been answered and that Elizabeth would have a son Zechariah did not believe him and began to question whether this was true. Gabriel told him that they were to name him John and that he would be rejoice that John had been born. John was to prepare the people of Israel for the Lord and the birth of Jesus. He would precede Jesus and prepare the people for Jesus' ministry. But because Zechariah had not believed he was to be struck dumb (not able to talk) until the time came for his son to be born.

Gabriel's prediction came true and Elizabeth became pregnant. She was so pleased that she secluded herself for the next five months. Only six months later would Gabriel go into Nazareth and inform Mary that she would bear God's son. As soon as Mary had her visit from Gabriel she hunted out Elizabeth and told her of Gabriel's visit. Elizabeth and Mary were either blood relatives or close kinswomen. John the Baptist was born 6 months before Jesus. When the child was born he was named John, even though the other priests kept insisting that they name him Zechariah after his father. True to the words of Gabriel at John's birth Zechariah was given back his speech.

Virtually nothing else is known of John the Baptist childhood except that he grew and became strong in spirit and lived in the desert. We will learn more about John the Baptist when their paths cross at the time of Jesus' baptism.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Gabriel, God's angel, appeared to Mary and told her that she had been selected among all women to bear the Son of God. Mary questioned Gabriel and asked how that could be since she had not been with a man. Gabriel assured Mary that she would be filled with the Holy Spirit and bear God's son. Mary questioned Gabriel no further but rushed into the hills to tell Elizabeth. When Mary shared with Joseph, the man she was engaged to, the details of Gabriel's visit he was amazed. You need to know that back in that day if a lady became pregnant the man she was engaged to could cause her great public embarrassment and have her put away. It was very common that if this situation occurred people would consider the groom guilty if he didn't divorce the bride. If he did divorce the bride he was suppose to keep the dowry that the bride's father had provided. As Joseph was considering what to do an angel appeared to him and told him that Mary was to have a child, God's son that was being sent to save His people from their sins. They were to name him Jesus. When Joseph awoke from what seemed like a dream to him he went quickly and married Mary. By doing this he was putting himself in a position to be publicly shamed. Thus the prediction of the angels came true

After they were married and Mary was almost ready to have Jesus Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor that each family had to return to their home to be counted. It would be like a census, but everyone had to travel because they no way of communicating long distance. The roads must have been crowded and Mary was due any minute. As they approached Bethlehem (where they were from) they could not find anyplace to stay. All of the Inns (motels) were full. Finally one innkeeper offered them a place in the stable where the animals lived. So Joseph took Mary to the stable and they settled in for the night. During the night Mary went into labor and baby Jesus was born. They had not crib so they wrapped Jesus in swaddling clothes any put him in a wooden trough that the animals ate out of. Here Joseph, Mary and baby Jesus started their life together.

The same night over in the hills outside of Bethlehem some shepherds were out in the fields taking care of their sheep. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared to them and told them that a child was born who is Christ the Lord. The angel directed them where to go as a multitude of other angel joined him and they began singing praises to God. When the angels left, the shepherds quickly left the hills to locate the baby that they had told about.

The shepherds told Joseph and Mary what the angels had told them. These events were things that Mary never forgot.

As was the custom in those days Jesus was circumcised when he was 8 days old and then formally given his name. Several weeks later Joseph and Mary took Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. This was the law. It was also expected that the parents bring a sacrifice. The law states that the sacrifice was to be “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” Sound familiar?

At the temple Simeon was working for the Lord. Although he was old the Holy Spirit had promised him that he would not die until he saw the Son of God. When Simeon saw baby Jesus he praised God and told Mary and Joseph that Jesus was destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel. A prophetess, Anna, was also present in the temple. Anna did not leave the temple even at night because she wanted to see Jesus.

When Mary and Joseph had fulfilled all the laws they took their son back to Nazareth. While Mary and Joseph were still in Jerusalem Magi (wise men) came searching for the Son of God. Many believed that the Magi were men of high position from Parthia near Babylon. This has never been confirmed. Before they arrived at Jerusalem the wise men had been following a star that suddenly appeared in the East. They asked King Herod about this new King who was born. King Herod became at once disturbed and afraid for his position. King Herod called together his chief priests and teachers to find out where this child was born. When Herod gave the information to the Magi he asked them to return to him and share the news so that he could also worship the child. HA! HA! He had other plans for this “KING”.

The Magi traveled on following the star. When they reached the stable they presented their gifts (gold, incense and myrrh) to this child they worshipped him. Because an angel had warned them about King Herod the Magi returned home to the west by another route so that they would not have to see King Herod.

Procedure

- Review the information and keep in your folder.

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C H R I S T M A S