

Church Year Story 6 The Nativity of Our Lord

*Catechism and Memory Verse
from the Congregation at Prayer for the Week*

BIBLE STORY: THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD—THE ANGELS SING THE GLORIA IN EXCELSIS Luke 2:1-21

Central Thoughts

- The birth of Jesus Christ is an historical event.
- Jesus is the Christ, the Son of David, born in fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament Scriptures.
- The glory of God is His eternal love and mercy for sinners in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- The Angel of the Lord proclaimed the Gospel to the shepherds: “Do not be afraid ... there is born to you a Savior.”
- Swaddling cloths and a manger bed is the sign that Jesus is born to save the lowliest of sinners.
- The angels of heaven sing of the glory of God's grace and forgiveness that is given to the earth in the birth of God's Son.
- Jesus' name proclaims His work: The LORD is salvation.

Key Questions and Answers

Who was Caesar Augustus?

The emperor of the Roman Empire at the time of Jesus' birth.

What was the purpose of the census?

Taxation

How were the people of the empire to be counted?

They were to return to their ancestral cities.

Where had Joseph and Mary been living?

Nazareth in Galilee

What was their ancestral city?

Bethlehem, Judea

Why were they to go to Bethlehem?

They were of the “house and lineage of David.”

What happened while Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem?

The time for Jesus to be born had come.

Where was He born and how did Mary care for Him?

He was born in a stable, laid in a manger (an animals' feeding trough), and wrapped in swaddling cloths.

What are “swaddling cloths”?

Strips of cloth to keep the baby dry and warm.

Why was there no room in the inn?

Many other relatives and descendants of David had arrived in Bethlehem and no one would make room for Mary and Joseph.

What were shepherds doing in the country of Judea at the time of Jesus' birth?

“Keeping watch over their flock by night.”

Who appeared and stood before the shepherds?

An angel of the Lord

What shone around the shepherds?

The glory of the Lord

Why did the shepherds respond with fear?

They were sinful men.

Of what does this scene remind us?

How the Lord and His glory often appeared to Moses and the children of Israel in the Old Testament, particularly at the tabernacle between the cherubim.

What was the angel's message?

“Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

What did the angel proclaim to the shepherds by this greeting?

The forgiveness of sins

What is the message of forgiveness called?

“Good tidings of great joy” or “the Gospel” [Good News] that is the source of the greatest of all joys.

What is the heart of this Gospel?

“There is born to you ... a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

What sign did the angel give that the Savior, the Lord Christ Himself, was born for the salvation of these sinful shepherds and all lowly sinners?

The Babe would be found wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in an animals' feeding trough.

What caused the heavenly host of angels to sing?

The message of the Gospel of salvation proclaimed to the shepherds.

With what words did the heavenly host praise God?

The Gloria in Excelsis: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!"

Where is this song used in the liturgy?

In the Divine Service, where we hear the Lord's Word and receive the Lord's body and blood—the same body and blood born of Mary and that suffered and died upon the cross for our salvation.

What is the "peace" of which the angels sang?

The peace of sins forgiven in the message of the Gospel.

What is the "goodwill" of God toward mankind?

His grace and favor in the gift of His Son to the world.

Why did the shepherds go to Bethlehem?

Because they were sinners who believed the message of the angel.

What did they find in Bethlehem?

They found the Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger, just as the angel said they would.

What did this sign attached to the Word of God do for them?

It comforted them and strengthened their faith in Christ.

What did they do afterward?

Like pastors (which means "shepherds") they proclaimed the same message of the Gospel that had been given them by the angel.

Who were the first people to hear the shepherds' preaching of the Gospel?

Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in the manger.

What did Mary do with the Word of God she received from the shepherds?

Pondered or meditated upon it in her heart.

What did the shepherds do after they left Bethlehem?

They gave glory to God and praised Him according to the Word of God that they had received from the angel.

What happened to the Child of Mary and Joseph on the eighth day?

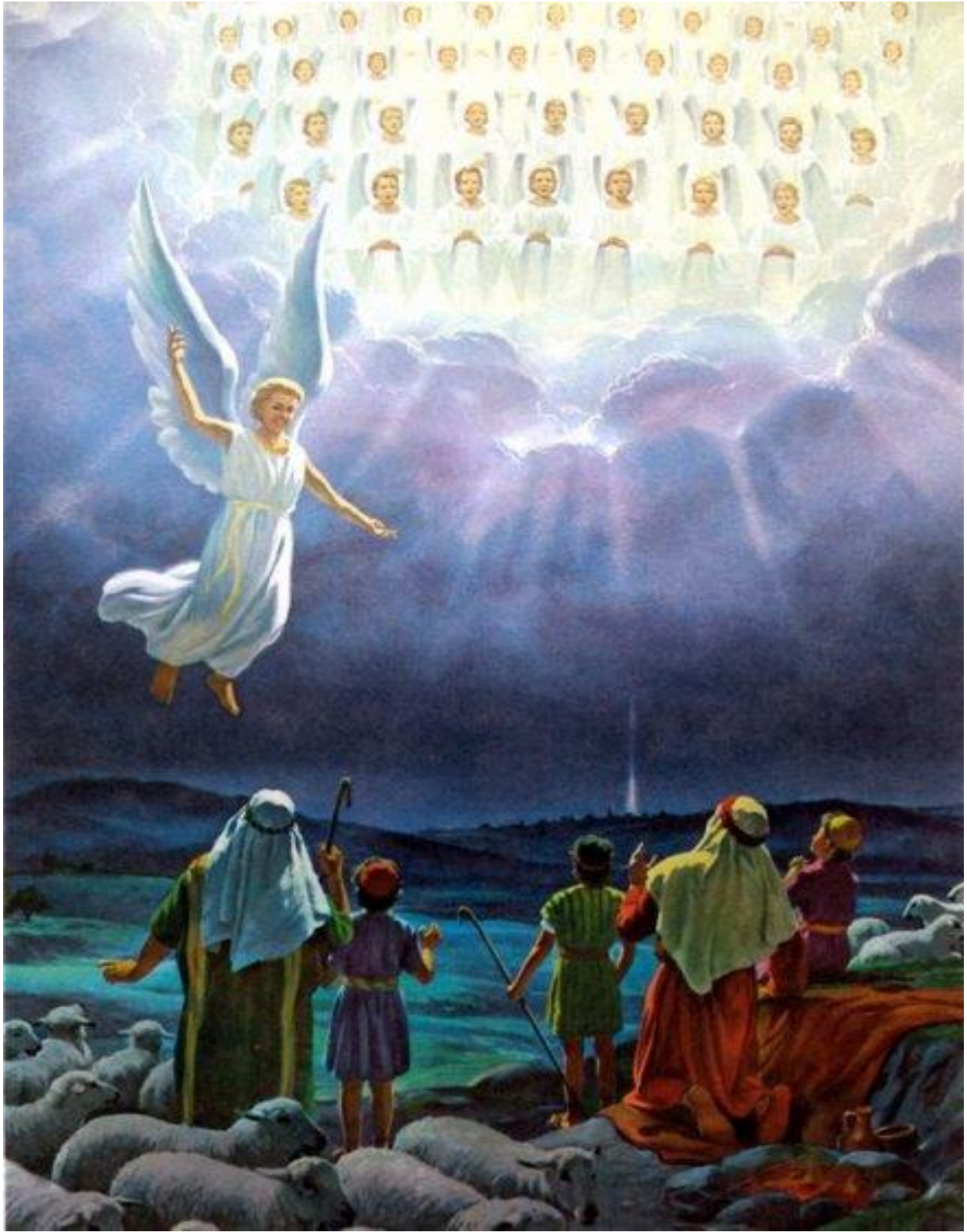
He was circumcised and named "Jesus" as the angel had directed.

Meditation on the Bible Story

The birth of the Son of God in human flesh is an historical event that took place in human history during the reign of Caesar Augustus. Jesus, the Christ, was born according to the promises of God in the Old Testament. He is both the Son of God and the Son of David, the anointed Christ, who brings the "peace" and "goodwill" of God's grace and forgiveness to the earth. Man cannot climb up to God and reach Him by his own works; God has come down from heaven to save sinful man by the death and resurrection of His Son. The sign of His grace and mercy to sinners is His lowly birth of the Virgin Mary in a cattle stall, the swaddling cloths that draped His body, and the manger bed where He lay. There was no room for them in the inn of Bethlehem because His own relatives would not recognize His birth. "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). Jesus' humiliation and suffering for the sins of the world began with His conception and birth. An angel of the Lord announced His birth to the shepherds and proclaimed to them the Gospel, saying, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." The "glad tidings" is the message of the Gospel of God's undeserved lovingkindness and grace to sinners. The angels of heaven give glory to God for this message in the singing of the *Gloria in Excelsis*. The angels of heaven sing because God's peace and goodwill in the forgiveness of sins has descended from heaven to earth in the birth of God's Son in human flesh. The angel's message draws the shepherds to Bethlehem, moves them to confess the wonders of God's grace, is pondered by Mary in her heart, and is summarized in the meaning of Jesus' name: The LORD Is Salvation. Forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation come by the name of Jesus who was born, suffered, died, and was raised again for our justification (i.e., that we might be declared righteous for the sake of Jesus who suffered and died for us under the Law). All this happened in fulfillment of what was written by the prophet Jeremiah: "Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jeremiah 23:5-6).

Prayer on the Bible Story

Heavenly Father, we give thanks to You for the birth of Your only begotten Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Comfort us with the sign of the manger and His swaddling clothes, so that in our suffering and struggle with sin we might know that we have Your peace and goodwill, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



The Nativity of Our Lord

Luke 2:1-20