

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

BIBLE TEXT : Matthew 2:1-23; Luke 2:1-20.

LESSON 417 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people" (Luke 2:10).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Matthew 2:1-23

- ¹ Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,
- ² Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.
- ³ When Herod the king had heard *these things*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.
- ⁴ And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.
- ⁵ And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet,
- ⁶ And thou Bethlehem, *in* the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.
- ⁷ Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.
- ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found *him*, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.
- ⁹ When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.
- ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.
- ¹¹ And when they were come into the house, they saw the young

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

Heavenly Visitors

The first Christmas, celebrated long years ago in the little town of Bethlehem, brought heavenly visitors to the hills of Judaea. The songs of angels were heard echoing among the clouds; and the shepherds who listened said that the whole heavens were filled with angelic choristers. A multitude of the heavenly host had come to sing "Glory to God in the highest," about the Saviour of the world who was born that night in Bethlehem.

The angels had known Jesus in Heaven, and had worshiped and adored Him as they sang around His throne. Everyone was happy in Heaven, and there was nothing to hurt them. But one day God looked down upon the earth and saw all the heartaches and misery and said it was time for Jesus to go down there to help the people.

Disobedience and Distress

The earth had once been a happy place, too; and this is what had happened. Instead of the people being obedient to God, they had turned from Him and committed all kinds of sin. So, of course, there was trouble in the world instead of happiness. In disobeying God, the people had sold themselves to Satan, and were no longer the children of God. They had nothing with which to pay for their sins. There was only One who could redeem them, or buy them back. He was Jesus.

Great Joy to All People

So when God saw the sorrow in the world and said it was time for Jesus to go as the Redeemer, Jesus went and was born in the stable of Bethlehem. Do you see why the angels were happy? They were so glad that God had made this way for the people on earth to again rejoice.

The shepherds were afraid when they saw the angels. Perhaps they thought they were going to die. But the leading angel exclaimed: "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." It was then the chorus of angels sent the praises echoing: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." No wonder the angels sang! The fairest Jewel of Heaven had come to dwell among men, to teach them how to live. Faith in Him would bring peace to the heart of any man. And the sacrifice for sin, the Lamb of God, was willingly giving Himself to men, to redeem them back to God.

Listening

We do not know if anyone but the shepherds heard the angel-songs; but those humble men feared God and they had hearts that would listen to a message from Heaven. To anyone who wants to hear, God will speak. We may not hear actual words, but our hearts will catch the message God wants to give us if we walk softly before Him, and pay attention to what He wants to tell us. Often when we read the Bible, some verse will come to our attention so plainly that it almost seems as though God had said the words just to us.

child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

¹² And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

¹³ And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

¹⁴ When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

¹⁵ And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

¹⁶ Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.

¹⁷ Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,

¹⁸ In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping *for* her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

¹⁹ But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

²⁰ Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and

We do not know that Mary and Joseph heard the songs of the angels, but the shepherds told them everything they had heard. Mary knew that her Child was the Son of God: and although she did not talk about it, she "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." It was a precious treasure to her to know that the angels had sung glorious anthems about her Baby.

Peace Received

What joy and peace came to the shepherds who saw Jesus! They went back to their humble task, their work made lighter by the joy in their hearts. They had seen Jesus, the Redeemer of the world! They had worshiped before Him, and had gone away blessed.

The shepherds said they had been directed by angels to the birthplace of the Saviour, "which is Christ the Lord." Everyone who heard it wondered about it; but we do not know whether very many went to see for themselves.

Many people today who hear the story of Redemption wonder that people's sins can be forgiven, that their lives can be transformed, and that peace and joy can replace bitterness and hatred; but they do not try to see Jesus. And therefore they do not find the peace, which He so freely gives to all who come to Him.

From a Land Afar

Although few of the many people in Bethlehem that night came to see Jesus, there were some wise men in a faraway country who had heard about his birthday, and they travelled a great distance to see Him. They were not of the Jews who were waiting for the Messiah, but they were honestly seeking for something of greater and more lasting value than their wisdom had given them. They, in their studies, had no doubt read the prophecies of Balaam who was inspired of God to say: "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel" (Numbers 24:17).

The wise men studied the stars, and one night they saw in the sky a brilliance they had never seen before. Could it be that God was giving a sign to the world that Israel's Messiah had come? Their hearts were stirred, and they rose up to follow the star of Bethlehem.

Looking

Perhaps anyone who looked could have seen this unusual star, and could have followed it to the Saviour; but we know of only these few wise men who were looking for eternal things, and who followed the star to the birthplace of the King of Glory.

Over deserts they travelled, crossing rivers, climbing hills, always keeping their eyes on the star, until they came to the city of Jerusalem where the king lived. This king was appointed by the Roman government and was not Israel's king of the line of David. The prophets had written that the Messiah would come from David's line, so of course, the wise men expected the Messiah to be a king, and went to the Jewish capital city to find Him.

Jerusalem Troubled

Today when an heir apparent is born into a royal family, all the people in the country are excited about it, and the story travels into all the world. It must have seemed strange indeed to the wise men when they came into Jerusalem and found no excitement, nor anyone who even seemed to know that a King had been born. The wise men asked, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." Instead of the people being happy about this startling news, they were troubled. The king heard it and he

go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.

²¹ And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

²² But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:

²³ And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

Luke 2:1-20

¹ And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

² (*And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.*)

³ And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

⁵ To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

⁶ And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

⁸ And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

⁹ And, lo, the angel of the Lord

was afraid someone might try to take his throne. He believed the story of the wise men, for surely such great men would not travel that long distance to look for a newborn child of another nationality unless they believed that God had given them a special revelation.

King Herod called the chief priests and scribes, who knew the Law, and asked if there was anything written in prophecy about a king to be born at this time; and if so, where. It did not take long to find the answer. They read: "And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel."

Herod pretended that he, too, wanted to worship the "Governor" the wise men were searching for, and he called them secretly to him and told them what the prophets had said. He asked them to go to Bethlehem and find the young child, and then bring him word again so he might worship, too.

The Guiding Star

The wise men started out at once, and there, ahead of them, they again saw the star. How happy they were to know that God was with them and guiding them still to the Saviour! God does not leave anyone groping alone in the dark, who wants to see Jesus. He will send the light to guide him to the truth.

Bethlehem was a small town not far from Jerusalem, and it was not long until the wise men arrived. And there they saw the light from that wonderful star shining right on the house where Jesus was with His parents. The wise men, great men of the world, entered that humble house and bowed low before the young Child. They opened the precious treasures they had brought, and gave them freely with all the love of their hearts. And these men of another nation received the blessing of God ahead of the priests and scribes, who did not recognise their own King.

Jesus' Escape

God warned the wise men in a dream not to return to Herod; and they went back to their own country by another way. Herod waited and waited for them to come to tell him where he could find Jesus, whom he wanted to destroy. Finally he realised they did not intend to return. He was very angry, and thought he would still be able to do away with Jesus. He ordered his servants to kill all the little children, two years old and younger, feeling sure that in this way Jesus would certainly be included. But God had taken good care of His Son, and He was living in Egypt with His father and mother, Joseph and Mary, while this terrible cruelty was going on in Jerusalem.

God has warned Joseph that Herod would cause trouble; so one day Joseph slipped away with his little family and took them far from danger. They were very poor, and no doubt the gifts of the wise men helped them on their journey to Egypt. There they remained until King Herod was dead. Joseph always listened when God spoke, and obeyed what he heard. When the king was dead, God told Joseph to go back to Judaea, and live in the town of Nazareth, fulfilling the Scripture, which said that Jesus would be called a Nazarene. And there the Child grew. We hear no more about Him until, at the age of twelve years, He was found in the Temple instructing the doctors of the Law.

QUESTIONS

1. Where was Jesus born?
2. Who announced His birth?
3. Who heard the announcement?
4. What did they do after they heard the announcement?
5. To whom else did God reveal that Jesus was born? How?

came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

¹⁰ And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

¹² And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

¹⁵ And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

¹⁶ And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

¹⁷ And when they had seen *it*, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

¹⁸ And all they that heard *it* wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

¹⁹ But Mary kept all these things, and pondered *them* in her heart.

²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

6. What did they do when they heard about it?
7. Where did the wise men look for Jesus?
8. How did they know where to go from Jerusalem?
9. What did Herod want to do to Jesus?
10. How did Jesus escape?