

THE STORY
CHAPTER 22
STUDY 22

The Story so far ...

Before anything was, Jesus already existed. When the timing was right according to God's plan, Jesus was born into this world in order to show us the Father. Not every one accepted Jesus. But to those who did accept him, Jesus gave the right to become children of God.

This is how the birth of Jesus came about:

One day the angel Gabriel visited Mary. She was pledged to be married to Joseph. They were not actually married, but being pledged in those days was more than an engagement. It needed a divorce to annul the relationship. During this time Mary was told that she would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Mary accepted this and burst into a spontaneous song of praise to God.

This put Joseph into a difficult position. He was now pledged to be married to a pregnant woman. He may have wanted to believe Mary, but he was nevertheless put into a very awkward position socially. Being a righteous man, Joseph had to divorce Mary. Being a compassionate man he decided to do it quietly. But then ... an angel appeared to him and confirmed Mary's story and told Joseph to marry Mary.

At that time there was a census being taken in Israel and Joseph and his pregnant wife had to head back to their home town of Bethlehem to be counted there. While she was there she gave birth to her son and they named him Jesus. It happened that shepherds were in the fields nearby. The angels appeared to them and alerted them of the birth of Jesus. They went to see the baby.

After the birth Joseph decided to stay in Bethlehem. While there the Magi from the East came looking for this king they believed had been born. Passing through Jerusalem they enquired about him. Herod got to hear about their enquiries and encouraged them to continue their search so that he might worship. He wanted to know so that he could murder a potential rival to his throne. The Magi found Jesus, and then seeing through Herod's deception, they did not report back to him. Meanwhile Joseph was warned in a dream to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt. While Joseph and his family were safely in Egypt, Herod murdered all the babies to try and get rid of a rival. They returned after Herod's death.

Jesus was obviously schooled in Torah – as all Jewish boys would have been. Plus he would have been taught carpentry by his dad. We do not hear about Jesus's childhood other than a cameo when he was 12 years old. On a trip to Jerusalem, Jesus got into a debate with the teachers in the temple. His parents thought he was lost. It was here that we have an idea that Jesus had some sort of self insight. In response to his parents' question, Jesus responded:

“Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?”

1. Why did God send Jesus into the world?

The answer to this question starts back in **Genesis chapters 1-3**. God created the world perfectly, created humankind so that he could enjoy intimacy with them. He put them in a perfect place, in perfect relationship with creation, in perfect relationship with each other and in perfect relationship with Himself. But then the devil got in on the act and suggested that God was somehow holding out on them – that there was more. That if they rebelled against God, by doing the one thing God had asked them not to do, then they would become like God. That was very attractive to them. They wanted to be like God. They rebelled, and we have what theologians call “The Fall.” Perfect relationship with creation, with each other and with God was broken. Genesis chapter 4-11 show humankind's various attempts to make their way back to God. What it is, is a record of humankind's deepening spiral into sin. Then we get to **Gen 12**, where God takes the initiative. God promises that He will set about restoring that earlier perfection.

The OT shows that these promises of restoration became centred around the Messiah who would be born. Jesus is that Messiah. All God's plans and promises for human kind were to be fulfilled in Jesus.

Why did God send Jesus into the world? To start the process of restoring intimacy between the Father and us and His creation.

2. What can we learn from Mary's reaction to her surprising and somewhat disturbing news?

We read that she was greatly troubled. She was perplexed. When we read about Mary, we read with our knowledge about her. She is a "saint" in our eyes when we read this. But remember that she was a peasant girl. She was a teenager, a very ordinary person. And she is confronted by the angel of the Lord. Put yourself in her position. How do you imagine you would feel? Maybe we can be amazed that she was "only" troubled, perplexed! And it is not surprising that the angel of the Lord needed to tell her: "Do not be afraid." She wouldn't have known if the angel was coming to give her bad news, so the angel needed to follow up: "you have found favour with the Lord."

Again, put yourself in Mary's shoes when she gets the full message. She knew she was a virgin. She would have known about the Messianic expectations. It would have been an overwhelming thought that she would be the mother of Messiah. BUT, she would have been aware of the social implications of one betrothed, but not married, being pregnant. Her first incredulous question is about the "mechanics" of it – she knew she was virgin. So how can she become pregnant? But when she learns about the Lord's plan, her response is amazing: "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."

Mary then responds with what we call the Magnificat. Mary's song of praise in response to the news. It shows that Mary knew her scriptures because those are words lifted from Hannah's prayer in **1Sam 2**. The song speaks of a coming Great Reversal. And the fact that so humble a peasant girl was chosen to give birth to the Messiah shows that the reversal – the first being last, the great being humbled – has started.

3. Why was Jesus born into such humble circumstances?

Already touched on it – there will be a great reversal. And Jesus coming from heaven's glory to a peasant girl and a stable shows that he is able to identify with those he came to save. I think that it also helps those of low estate to identify with Jesus. He was a carpenter. He had to earn his living with his hands. He lived with the question mark of being illegitimate hanging over him his whole life.

All this adds weight to Jesus' love for us – He left heaven's glory, not to live an out-of-touch life as a prince, but to show the full extent of His love. He became as a slave. He loved us that much.

I don't know if there is a definitive answer for this – certainly not from the text.

4. What does this chapter reveal about who Jesus is?

Jesus is the Word – the Logos. The Word is God. In other words, Jesus is God. Jesus was with God in the beginning. He was **ALREADY WITH GOD** in the beginning. This lets us know that Jesus is eternal – He always was. This is important. Many sects will tell us that Jesus only came into being at His birth. Truth is, the Bible teaches us that Jesus "eternally was." **AND** that Jesus is God. We are to understand that Jesus is the Creator – through him **ALL THINGS** were made.

We learn that eternal life – true life – comes through Jesus. We learn that we can know exactly what the Father is like by looking at the Son.

We learn that though Jesus was fully God, yet He was also fully human. He was born of a woman, in the normal way babies are born. His *conception* was supernatural but His *birth* was not.

We learn that in the events surrounding His birth, many of the OT prophecies were fulfilled. Born in Bethlehem, the weeping in Ramah, being called out of Egypt.

5. What impact has the birth of Jesus had on your life?

If you know that the people in your group are Christians, ask them for a two minute story about how they came to accept Jesus and the difference He has made. Or simply ask several who are Christians. If the group has already heard each other's story then ask for a testimony of how Jesus made a difference to their lives since accepting Jesus.

6. Why should you be thankful that God sent his Son into the world?

Referring back to the answer to the first question, it has to do with being able to enjoy intimacy with the Father.