

CHAPTER 22, THE BIRTH OF THE KING

TIMELESS TRUTH: THE WORD BECAME FLESH.

CHAPTER SUMMARY (Have someone in your group read the summary section.)

Heaven had been very quiet for 400 years. No burning bushes. No splitting seas. No visions. No dreams. No prophets. No message from God...just silence.

Then, in a magnificent yet inauspicious way, a word – but not just a word, The Word came. At the time, the event seemed inconsequential to all but a blue collar carpenter and his teenage bride. But in fact, the Word of God had taken on flesh and blood and was first heard in a baby's cry. His birth was unspectacular, yet His presence dispelled darkness and cast an inescapable ray of light across history, past, present, and still unwritten. God's promises to Abraham and David had found fulfillment at long last. Jesus would bless all nations and would take His rightful place on David's throne. It is this event to which everything thus far in The Story has pointed.

Mary was the first to hear the news. In the midst of wedding plans and setting up house, the angel Gabriel pronounced that she had been chosen to give birth to the Son of God. Nothing could have been further from her mind...or her to do list. Mary was engaged and a virgin. The power of the Most High would take care of everything, he said. So Mary rejoiced. She accepted her position as God's servant and praised Him with purest trust in His plan. Joseph was the next to know. He considered pursuing a legal dissolution of their relationship to save them both from the humiliation of an illegitimate pregnancy. But he received his own angelic visitor, who confirmed Mary's innocence and gave his blessing on their marriage. Joseph married Mary and soon after made the journey to Bethlehem to pay his taxes as required by law. The town was bustling, and the inn was full – so the Son of God was born in a stable.

Angels delivered the birth announcement and shepherds became the welcoming committee for the King of Kings. They hurried to see for themselves, and found a surprisingly unassuming setting for a king: a baby in a feeding trough, accompanied by his mother, earthly father, and the local livestock. God also sent signs in the stars and faraway wise men charted their course with gifts in hand. King Herod felt threatened by the birth of another monarch, so he ordered the massacre of all the baby boys in the surrounding areas. God sent angels again so His redemptive plan would stay its course. They warned Joseph in a dream to flee to Egypt until it was safe to return.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus returned to Israel only after Herod's death and they made their home in Nazareth. Jesus grew up there as the precocious son of pious Jews. He and His family traveled to Jerusalem every year to celebrate Passover. When Jesus was 12, He stayed behind in the temple unbeknownst to his frantic parents. They found Him sitting with the teachers who were amazed at His words. Jesus grew up as all boys do and Scripture tells us that He increased in wisdom and favor with God and with people.

God's Upper Story intersects with His Lower Story at the birth of Jesus Christ, the God-man. God's redemptive story approaches its climax as the Son of God from eternity past becomes the Son of Man for eternity future. Messiah has finally come.

ICEBREAKER QUESTION: What is your favorite part of the Christmas story and why? If you were in a Christmas pageant as a child, what part did you play?

1. These verses in the Gospel of John reveal one of the most important beliefs. How does page 309, or John 1:1-14, 18, help clarify the relationship between God and Jesus? Why is this so important?
2. “*In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind*” (p. 309, John 1:4). Look up John 5:21-29, 6:47-58, 10:10, 11:25, 14:6, 17:3, and 20:31. What does it mean, that in Him was life?
3. List some of the names of Jesus and their meaning or significance (see also Isaiah 9:6-7).
4. What things did Mary know about her child even before she conceived (p. 310)? Why was this important?
5. In response to her situation, Mary offers a song of praise (p. 310-311). Compare Hannah’s praise song in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. How these songs are similar? Did Mary see herself as part of God’s Lower Story or part of His Upper Story?
6. What do you suppose Joseph thought and felt about Mary’s pregnancy before and after the angelic visitation (p. 311-312)? What is the difference between having faith in people and having faith in God?
7. Joseph was “*faithful to the law*” (p. 311, Luke 1:19) but was not necessarily considered to be so by others (John 8:41). What examples can you find of his faithfulness?
8. Herod was not the first evil ruler to commit, or attempt, infanticide against Hebrew babies. What other examples can you recall? What does this teach you about God’s Upper Story plan of redemption?
9. The text tells us “*all who heard [about Jesus] were amazed*” (pg. 313). What do you suppose it was that surprised them?

In the time remaining ask your group members to share any of their personal reflection insights from their journal entries.

CLOSING PRAYER

CHAPTER 23, JESUS' MINISTRY BEGINS

Journal your answers to these questions as you read through the chapter this week. You may wish to read one day and journal the next, or spread the questions over the whole week.

DAY 1

1. Review the temptation of Jesus (p. 322). Look up Hebrews 2:14-18 and 4:14-16. How does Jesus' temptation benefit you personally?
2. John the Baptist pointed two of his own disciples toward Jesus (p.324). They "*went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him*" (p. 324). If you could spend the day with Jesus, what would you ask?
3. Both Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman struggled to understand what Jesus meant by eternal life. What do these passages teach you about eternal life? How would explain eternal life to some one else?

DAY 2

1. "*Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony*" (p. 329). What do you suppose she said and why do you suppose it was so effective? Practice sharing your testimony by writing a brief paragraph of what Jesus has done in your life. Finally, pause and pray that the LORD will give you an opportunity this week to share it.
2. What do you learn about the heart of God from Jesus' interaction with the sick, the seekers and the sinners (p. 329-332)? Which group of people could you cultivate a greater compassion for?

DAY 3

1. John began to doubt Jesus when he was in prison (p. 333-334). How have doubts actually strengthened your faith?
2. During his ministry Jesus interacted with followers, doubters, and mockers. If you had met Jesus at this time, which do you think you would have been? Why?