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Jesus is born

Luke 1-2



The little town of Nazareth clings to a hilltop in the region of Galilee. Long ago, it was home to a young woman named Mary.

She was looking forward to getting married. Her husband-to-be was named Joseph.

One day, God sent the angel Gabriel to give her a message.

‘May you have peace and joy!’ said the angel. ‘God has blessed you.’

Mary was overcome with awe. Who was this messenger? What did the words mean?

‘Don’t be afraid,’ said Gabriel. ‘God has chosen you to be the mother of a special child: you will name him “Jesus”.

‘He will be a king like the great King David – the



one who, long ago, ruled your people and rescued them from their enemies.

‘Jesus’ kingdom will last for ever.’

Mary felt as if her breath had been taken away. When she did speak, it was barely a whisper.

‘That can’t be true,’ she said. ‘I’m a virgin – not yet married.’

‘God will make it come true,’ said the angel. ‘Your child will be God’s own Son.’

Mary bowed her head. ‘I am ready to do what God wants,’ she said.



At this time, the land of the Jewish people was actually ruled by foreigners. It was part of the vast Roman empire.

The emperor, Augustus, had just ordered a census. He wanted everyone to put their details on a special register. Then he would be able to work out who needed to pay taxes and how much.

Joseph and Mary agreed to register together: after all, they were soon to be married and they would then be family.

The emperor wanted everyone to register in their home town, so Mary and Joseph set off for Bethlehem. It was famous as the birthplace of King David, and Joseph was proud that he was descended from the nation's greatest leader.

After a journey of several days, they arrived. Bethlehem was full of visitors. There was no room anywhere – the local inn was fully booked. Mary and Joseph had no choice but to shelter in a stable.





While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby. She wrapped him in the traditional baby clothes called swaddling. Then she laid him in a manger as proudly as if it had been a proper cradle.



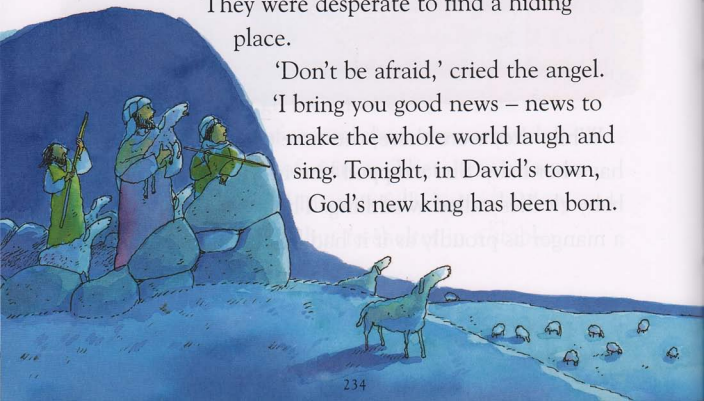
Out in the fields nearby, some shepherds were wide awake. They were keeping watch over their flocks of sheep all through the dark and dangerous night.

Suddenly, they gasped with fear. Something they had never seen before shone out in front of them like a bright, white fire.

There, in the glittering light, stood one of God's angels.

The shepherds huddled back into the shadows. They were desperate to find a hiding place.

'Don't be afraid,' cried the angel.
'I bring you good news – news to make the whole world laugh and sing. Tonight, in David's town, God's new king has been born.'





'He is the one who will lead you to freedom:
the one who will make the whole world new.

'Go and see him! He's wrapped in swaddling
clothes and lying in a manger.'

All at once, hundreds and thousands of angels
appeared and they burst out singing:

*'Glory to God in heaven;
Peace on earth.'*



The angels' melody rang across the skies, wilder and more wonderful than any music the shepherds had ever heard.

Then, as suddenly as they had appeared, the angels vanished into heaven.

The shepherds looked at one another. They were too shaken to speak.

Then one shouted, 'Come on! Let's go and find out if any of this is true.'

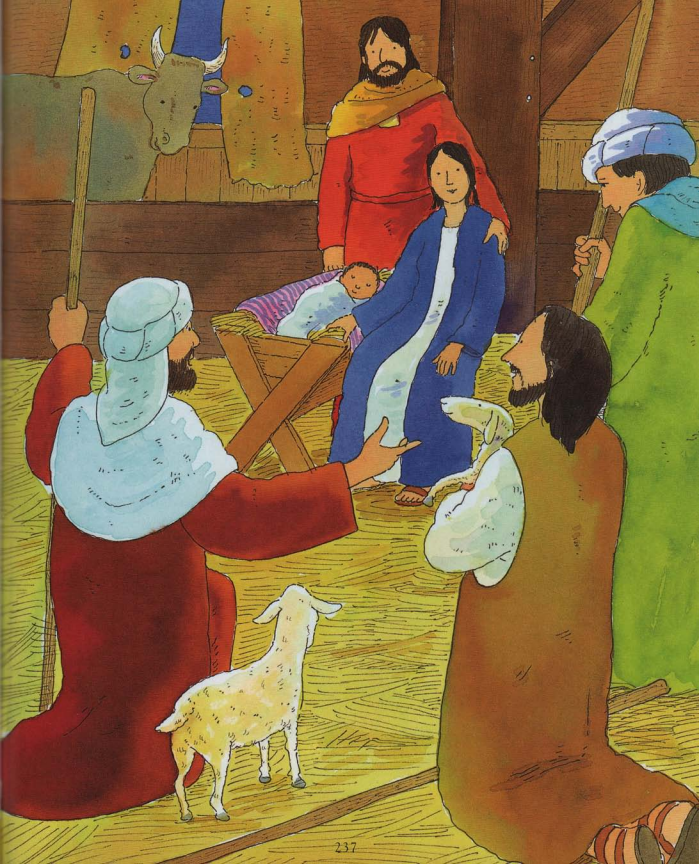
They hurried off to Bethlehem, peering in through doorways and windows wherever they saw a glimmer of light.

At last they found Mary and Joseph and saw the baby in the manger.

'Let us tell you about what we saw!' they said. 'Heaven's angels told us all about your newborn son and the wonderful things he will do.'

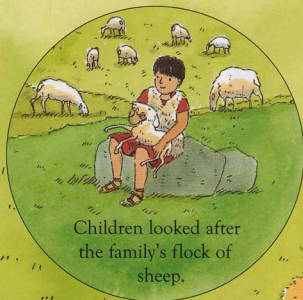
Mary listened hard. She wanted to remember everything the shepherds said. She wanted to treasure the words for ever.





Babies and children

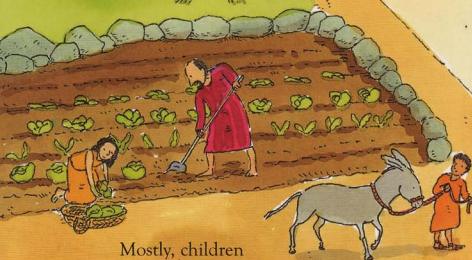
In Bible times, people could not afford to let babies and young children get in the way of working for a living!



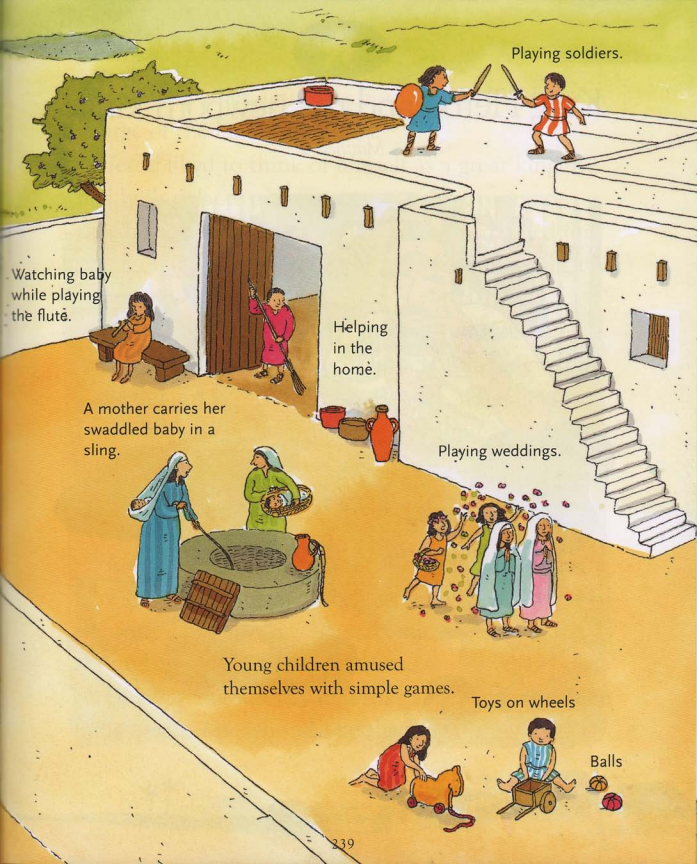
Children looked after the family's flock of sheep.



Sometimes babies are put in a hammock.



Mostly, children joined in with the grown-ups' jobs.



Playing soldiers.

Watching baby while playing the flute.

Helping in the home.

A mother carries her swaddled baby in a sling.

Playing weddings.

Young children amused themselves with simple games.

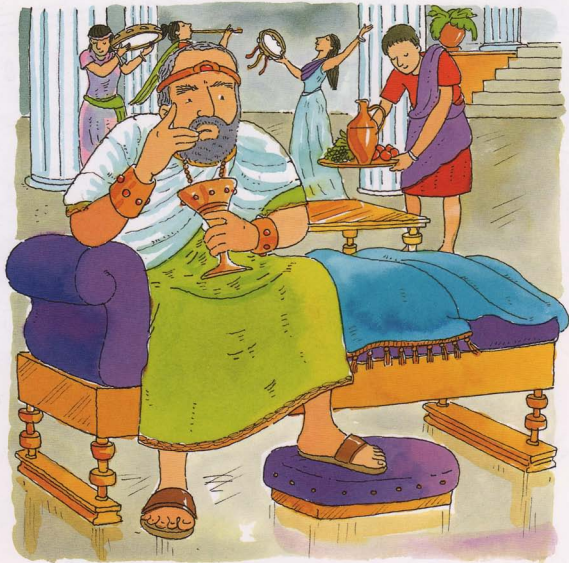
Toys on wheels

Balls



King Herod and the newborn king

Matthew 2



At the time when Jesus was born, King Herod was in charge of the land of the Jews.

Herod liked to think of himself as a great king: he had built palaces and fortresses to show everyone that he was rich and powerful. He had arranged for the Temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt so that religious Jews would support him.

Even so, he knew that his job was not safe. His own relatives were jealous of him, and he knew that some might plot against him. Besides, the emperor in Rome had the final say about everything: at any moment he could choose someone else to be king.

So he was not pleased when his private guards brought him this news:

‘Your Majesty, some visitors are causing quite a stir here in Jerusalem. They are scholars from lands far to the east. They say they have seen a new star in the sky and that it has led them here.

‘They say the star is a sign that a new king has been born... someone who will be the king of the Jews.’



King Herod called a meeting of all the important people who might know something useful.

‘Listen,’ he said to them. ‘There’s been talk about God sending a great king to the Jewish people for years – hundreds of years, in fact. I know that the ancient books of our people talk about this king. Now tell me, what exactly do they say? Where is this king going to be born?’

‘In Bethlehem,’ the priests replied eagerly. ‘The book of the prophet Micah is quite clear.’

They read the treasured words aloud.

‘That’s all I need from you then,’ Herod interrupted. ‘You may go.’

Alone with his private guards, he barked another order: ‘Fetch those visitors. I’ll expect them here tonight.’

A few hours later, in a lamplit room in the palace, King Herod listened to all the visitors had to say about the star.

He leaned forward. ‘I’ve been doing my best to





help you,' he said. 'I've found out that the king will be born in Bethlehem.

'Now I'd like you to help me: go there, find the king, and then come back here. I want to show my respect for him too; however, it is important that my visit be a surprise.'

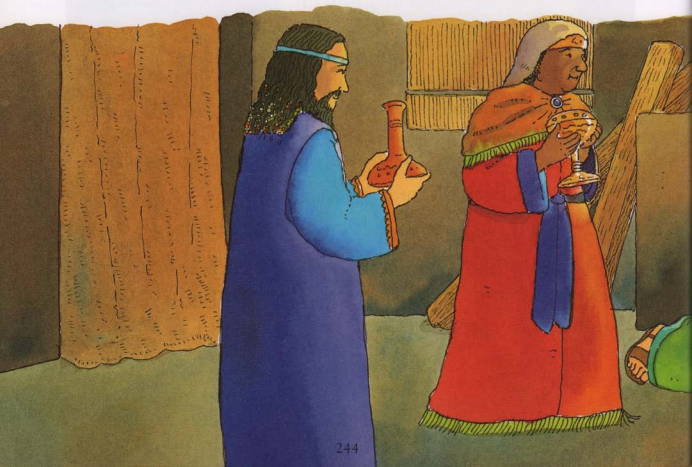


The scholars from the east set out at once.

‘Look!’ said one. ‘There’s the star. It’s leading us to Bethlehem. Everything is working out perfectly.’

And so it was. The star dipped low over one little house in Bethlehem. Inside they found Mary and her baby son.

At once, they knelt down and paid homage. It seemed to each of them that the little boy was already the greatest king in all the world.



Then they brought out rich gifts. 'Here is gold,' said one, 'the symbol of royal power.'

'Here is frankincense,' said the second, 'the symbol of someone who is a priest to his people and brings them close to God.'

'Here is myrrh,' said the third, 'the symbol of healing: in your son's kingdom, everyone will be made well.'

