

**Purpose**

- To learn the part that angels had in the birth of Jesus
- To look at the Christmas story from the perspective of Joseph.

**Materials**

- Bibles
- Handouts

**Background Information****ANGELS**

We all have read in the Bible about angels. In Bible times angels appeared many times to God's people. Remember when Hagar fled Sarah and took Ishmel with her. Hagar was afraid Sarah would be unkind to her and her son by Abraham. Because they took very little provisions Ishmel was in danger for his life. An angel appeared to Hagar and said to go back to Sarah and God would take care of them. (Gen. 16:7) then again when God's angel appeared to Joshua to assure him that the battle in Jericho would go well (Joshua 5:14-15). Throughout the Old and New Testament angels appeared to God's followers to either warn them or to comfort them. When these angels appeared they could be seen and heard. People could even talk to these angels.

The New Testament starts out with stories from the Gospels telling about angels preparing people for the birth of Jesus. All four gospels tell us the story but Matthew and Luke seem to make it easier to understand and follow. In Luke 1 we are told that an angel appeared to Zechariah to announce to him that his wife Elizabeth would have a son. Now Zechariah and Elizabeth were old and this was quite a shock. The angel instructed them to name him John and he would be a forerunner of Jesus. When Zechariah questioned the angel he was struck dumb (unable to speak). The angel (Gabriel) said Zechariah would not speak until the child was born. This came true and his speech did not come back until the birth of John the Baptist.

Next an angel went to Mary and told her she was to have a son. Mary must have really wondered about this since she was not married and only engaged to Joseph. Mary was young and still a virgin so she was shocked but agreed to do as God had instructed. She must have wondered what would happen to her since the laws of the day were very strict about these types of situations. If a girl was engaged and became pregnant the man could refuse to marry her and even go into public and tell everyone that the girl was pregnant. The man could even have her put to death. This must have worried Mary.

An angel also appeared to Joseph and told him that Mary was about to have a child. He was not to worry because the child was God's son. Remember Joseph did not have to marry her in fact many people would make fun of him if he did marry Mary. The angel assured Joseph that he should marry her and help her raise God's son. Joseph did agree to do as God asked of him. This was very unusual for that time.

Now who was the first one that angels told that Jesus had been born? Yes, the shepherds. Now shepherds were not very well thought of back then. They were barely

paid anything to be a shepherd, so they were poor. They must have smelled because of the sheep and probably not too clean either. Most people did not want to be around any shepherds. So why did God tell them first? God often selects people to help him that are not pretty or rich. Remember the list you have in your folder about the people that God used. After the angels told the shepherds they went down to see the Baby and then went out and told others.

## DREAMS

Sometimes in the Bible people had dreams. Did you ever wonder if these dreams were actually angels appearing when someone is sleeping? This we will never know.

Many times dreams gave God's people instructions about what they were to do. Remember Samuel, when he first went to the temple with Eli he had dreams and heard God speaking to him. It took several times for Samuel to report this to Eli and they figured out that it was God speaking to him. Time and time again dreams appeared to be either God speaking to people or angels talking for God.

After Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem to register to pay taxes and Jesus is born they stay in Bethlehem for about two years. After the wise men visited and left Joseph had another dream. In this dream an angel revealed to him that he should take Mary and Jesus and flee to Egypt because King Herod was searching for Jesus and his family. Herod was afraid of Jesus because he had been told that this child was to be King of the Jews. Herod was afraid that he would have too much power and overthrow Herod. Joseph again did as he was told. (Matthew 2:13)

The angel returned later to tell Joseph that it was safe to take Mary and Jesus home to Israel. Herod was dead and it was safe. (Matthew 2:19-20) However; another dream warned Joseph not to return to Bethlehem because Herod son, Archelaus, was reigning now and he also was searching for Jesus. Joseph then took Mary and Joseph to Nazareth. Remember the Jesus was called the Nazarene (that means he was from Nazareth). (Matthew 2:21-23)

Do you believe in angels? Do you believe that angels speak to people today? Many times people speak about having an angel or a guardian angel. Do you know anyone that has seen an angel, heard an angel, or even had a conversation with an angel? Have you ever felt that you have an angel? Why do we not see or hear them like the people did in Jesus' day? When I asked my son about this he replied "Maybe they were more receptive to angels." I never thought of it that way, but maybe that is true. What do you think?

## JOSEPH

Joseph did as God commanded him and married Mary. He even moved them when the dreams told him to. Do you think he had an easy life? Can you imagine living in the same house as Jesus when he was a child? It sure would scare me to be either the mother or father of Jesus.

Joseph must have had a lot of faith to do all of these things. He must have really loved Mary and been a very good man. I think we would call him a man of principles. He really didn't care what other people thought of him.

The last lesson told a very brief version about Jesus' birth. I hope that between that and this lesson you may learn and look at the birth of Jesus in a new light.

**Procedure**

- Read the background information of angels.
- Read background material on Joseph
- Do handout 55-1 for fun. Again I have answers if you want them.