

DAY 5
READING:
LUKE 2:12

This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

A JOURNEY FORWARDS

After the shock of the divine messenger came the first, real 'Hallelujah Chorus' sung by a vast cluster of angels. When I've listened to the Hallelujah Chorus, even sung by a half-good choir, I need to sit down and absorb it. But the shepherds knew they had a journey to make. How else could they check whether the message they had been given was true or not?

So they got up, left the sheep and off they went!

Perhaps it's time for some of us to move on from our entrenched positions – never to take this Christian stuff seriously, never to get sucked in or let it affect me! Those shepherds had good reasons not to move forwards, but they took their chance.

We can only check out whether the angel's

message (or the nativity play's or the preacher's, or the Bible's) is true by taking the risk of taking a good, clear look at what is being claimed. We can't do that if we refuse to move.

As we do, we can find ourselves part of an amazing ongoing story, the greatest story ever told. It doesn't stop with a manger or even teaching about how to live the good life. The Jesus story includes healing, compassion and friendship, but also the pain of death and the joy of resurrection. And God wants to include us in his love as we move on with him.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you that this Christmas story tells us that you have embraced not only the whole world but also me. Help me to explore who you are and what you offer, with honesty and thoroughness. Amen

What next?

There are many excellent Bible reading notes available in the UK today to help you engage daily with the Word of God. To find out more visit

www.grow-with-the-bible.org.uk

This leaflet is produced by Grow with the Bible in association with BibleFresh www.biblefresh.com and The 2011 Trust

www.kingjamesbibletrust.org

Other leaflets in this series include Bible readings for Easter, Harvest and Bible Sunday.



WORKING TOGETHER TO HELP YOU EXPLORE THE BIBLE EVERY DAY

CHRISTMAS READINGS

Christmas-time is a great opportunity for us to get to know the Bible better.

The readings and reflections in this leaflet explore the nativity story – and how it might apply to us today.

We hope you will enjoy these readings, part of a series of leaflets produced by Grow with the Bible as we celebrate the Bible in the English language and mark the 400th anniversary of the King James Version Bible in 2011. If you want to know more visit www.grow-with-the-bible.org.uk

Luke 2:1–14

KING JAMES VERSION (SHORTENED)

¹And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed ... ⁴And 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:) ⁵To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child ... ⁷And 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. ⁸And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them ... ¹⁰And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ¹⁴Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (SHORTENED)

¹In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world ... ⁴So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judaea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child ... ⁷and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. ⁸And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹An angel of the Lord appeared to them ... ¹⁰But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. ¹³Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.

**DAY 1
READING:
LUKE 2:1**

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

AN ENFORCED JOURNEY

Christmas often involves a lot of travelling for a lot of people. Parents and grandparents want to see their children and grandchildren – and vice versa. We can all look forward to the excitement of the presents and the Christmas food. But first there is the journey. Getting everything ready and packing the car (and ensuring children don't see what they are not supposed to) can be a real demand, especially at the end of a busy period – shopping, sending cards and wrapping presents, never mind meeting deadlines at work.

If you feel a bit like this, spare a thought for Joseph and Mary. They had to travel simply because Caesar said so – it was an Imperial Decree! They didn't like the Romans and no

one likes having to do something because it's a government command. So imagine their 'reluctance'.

If you're not reluctant either about the journey or about having a house full of excited people, or indeed about attending a Christmas service, then maybe spare a thought for those who are.

In any case, it's worth remembering that the Christmas we celebrate began with an inconvenient imposition for Joseph and Mary but ended up with joyful news for all the world, including us. To find out more read on...

Lord Jesus Christ, your birth involved a very inconvenient journey. Please be with all who are facing demanding journeys. Please help me cope well with any inconveniences which come my way. Amen

**DAY 2
READING:
LUKE 2:4**

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David

A JOURNEY BACKWARDS

So, why did Joseph end up in Bethlehem?

A thousand years before, Joseph's ancestor David had been born there, the youngest son in a large family. Nobody bothered much about him as he grew up – apart, that is, from God! God had chosen him to become Israel's greatest king. So David became the icon of the nation. Like many prestigious people he moved on and made Jerusalem his capital city. So it was that Joseph, who traced his family line back to David, had to go to Bethlehem. Like many of us our Christmas journey is back to our roots – perhaps to our birth place or at least back to the family home.

But for some of us, attending a Christmas service is also a step backwards, perhaps because we are back in a church where we

were nurtured, so the memories flood in; or perhaps because it seems like a backward step – a kind of intellectual or emotional regression. We gave up on religion years ago – like Joseph left Bethlehem for another kind of life when he became an adult!

However, for Joseph it turned out to be a monumentally significant journey backwards. Although he probably hadn't realised it, Bethlehem had a special place in God's plans for Joseph as well as David. The same can be true for us as we return home.

Lord Jesus Christ, please help us to explore the riches in our family roots and traditions. Especially help me, through all the Christmas activities, to revisit the reality of who you are and why you journeyed to share our world. Amen

**DAY 3
READING:
LUKE 2:5,7**

He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child... and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.

A JOURNEY ONWARDS

Why here, why now?

The registration of Mary as Joseph's wife, in Bethlehem because Augustus commanded it, meant there was no going back! He was married!

Understandably, when Joseph had learnt that Mary, his betrothed, was pregnant, and he knew for sure he wasn't the father, he considered seriously breaking off from marrying her. But now it was official! It was in the census.

Inconvenient as it all was for Mary and Joseph, it was there in Bethlehem that Jesus was born, as we all know. They didn't choose the place or the time – babies come when they're ready! Jesus would change everything for them. Although we might think 'how wonderful – bringing up God's son', it actually brought

responsibilities and challenges. Everything would change, from that day onwards.

Christmas is our invitation from God to make a decisive break with the past and to move on, as we welcome Jesus into our lives too. Unlike Mary and Joseph, we can choose whether to accept God's gift or not. But like them we cannot escape the responsibility of responding to God's offer of new life with Jesus.

The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us. (John 1:14)

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for all the good things that make up our Christmas celebrations. Please help me find time to enjoy you and all the new life you can offer me. Amen

**DAY 4
READING:
LUKE 2:8**

And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

GOING NOWHERE

Not everyone is on the move at Christmas.

Some of us may be too unwell to travel far, some of us may be acting as the host family – we stay put and everyone comes to us.

It was much like this for the shepherds. They were well and truly stuck. For them the thought of a good night's sleep in their own home was a luxury they could only dream about – apart from the fact they shouldn't really drop off to sleep. They were not going anywhere. During the day they would be on the move finding pasture for the flocks of sheep they looked after, but at night they clustered together around their sleepy sheep. There was safety in numbers when it came to driving off bandits or hungry animals.

Then heaven came to earth!

Now there was no safety in numbers. When the divine messenger appeared, enveloped in a dazzling brightness they had only heard about in old stories from their Bible, they were all completely terrified.

Those old stories came alive in the angel's words, 'Don't be afraid! Good news... great joy... in David's town your Saviour has been born...'

They discovered that that the old stories came to life for them – personally – and they can for us too, today.

That's why we are here.

Lord Jesus Christ, wherever people need startling out of their apathy or freeing from their routines we pray that your good news would reach them in new and amazing ways. Amen