



The Savior

The symbol for *The Savior* is the star that guided the wise men to Jesus. (Matthew 2:2)

The Story Continues

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." Matthew 2:1-2

Hundreds of years after the last of Israel's prophets, the search for God continues. Some search the Scriptures and some search the stars. When Jesus is born in Bethlehem, he is worshipped by shepherds from nearby fields and by visitors from distant lands — for he is to be the Savior of all: the poor and the wealthy, the innocent and the wise.

After his birth Mary, Joseph, and Jesus flee to Egypt to escape Herod's threats. They return home to Nazareth only when Joseph is told in a dream that it is safe to do so. In God's new deliverance Jesus is brought out of Egypt — just as Moses and the people of Israel had been. At the age of twelve Jesus visits the Temple in Jerusalem. He then returns to Nazareth with his family.

The New Testament accounts of Jesus' life are not biographies; there is much about his life that is untold. Instead, the stories about Jesus are given the name Gospels, meaning "good news." Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each write a Gospel to tell the good news of Jesus of Nazareth. All four include stories about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Two, Matthew and Luke, write about his birth and childhood. Since all four Gospels are written after Jesus' resurrection, all the stories about him, including the stories of his birth and childhood, are told by people who experienced and confessed Jesus as the risen Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of humanity.

Even though you may already know the story of Jesus, each Gospel is written as though you, the reader, are asking the question “Who is Jesus?” The next seven discoveries provide opportunities to search for answers to that question.

Preparing for the Search

The information about the following people, places, and terms will help you prepare to read the passages in *The Savior*.

Anna, a devout woman of advanced age who visited the Temple daily, was there the day Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to be dedicated to God. Along with Simeon, she recognized the baby Jesus as the Messiah. (Luke 2:36-38)

Bethlehem, a village about five miles south of Jerusalem on the main highway to Hebron and Egypt, was the birthplace of Jesus. Before Jesus’ birth, the importance of Bethlehem centered on the lives of Ruth, Jesse, and David. Bethlehem is the setting for most of Ruth’s story. Jesse, David’s father, made his home in Bethlehem, and David was anointed king there by Samuel.

Caesar Augustus, the first Roman Emperor, ruled from about 27 BCE to 14 CE. For purposes of taxation, Caesar Augustus ordered the census (or enrollment) of the Roman Empire that resulted in Mary and Joseph journeying to Bethlehem.

Christ (See Messiah)

Elizabeth, wife of the priest Zechariah, became the mother of John the Baptist in her old age. She was a kinswoman of Mary, mother of Jesus, and was visited by Mary at her home in the hill country of Judea. Elizabeth recognized that Mary’s child was to be God’s promised Messiah. (Luke 1:5-45)

Emmanuel (or Immanuel), which means “God with us,” was the name given by the prophet Isaiah to the child to be born to a young woman. (Isaiah 7:14) Matthew believed that Jesus fulfilled the words of Isaiah, so he quoted the prophet in his Gospel. Jesus is “God with us.” (Matthew 1:22-23)

Frankincense and Myrrh were two gifts the Wise Men brought to Jesus. They were gum resins used to produce incense and perfume. Both were highly prized. Myrrh was also used in embalming.

Gabriel, an angel, was sent as God's messenger to both Daniel the prophet and Zechariah the priest. It was Gabriel who helped Daniel with the meaning of a dream and the interpretation of a vision. (Daniel 8:15-26; 9:20-27) Gabriel announced to Zechariah that he and his wife Elizabeth would be parents of John. (Luke 1:11-22)

Herod the Great, King of Judea, ruled from 37-4 BCE. After the wise men had arrived in Jerusalem to worship the new king of the Jews, Herod felt a further threat to his power and ordered the murder of all the boys in Bethlehem under the age of two. (He had already murdered many rivals to his throne, including two of his sons.) Following Herod's death, three of his sons divided his kingdom. When Mary, Joseph, and Jesus returned from Egypt, they settled in Galilee where Herod Antipas ruled (4 BCE - 39 CE) rather than Judea, which was under the treacherous rule of Herod Archelaus (4 BCE - 6 CE).

Jesus. The name is a Latin translation of the Greek name Iesous, which is a translation of the Hebrew name Joshua. The meaning in Hebrew is "Yahweh is salvation." Jesus was given his name by God's angel, who said to Joseph, "...you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)

Joseph, pledged in marriage to Mary, became her husband after an angel of God told him the wonderful news that Jesus, the baby Mary was carrying, was conceived by God in order to save people from their sins. A descendant of the house of David, Joseph journeyed with Mary to Bethlehem at the time of the census, presented Jesus in the Temple for dedication, fled to Egypt to avoid Herod, and returned to Nazareth to live. Joseph does not play an active role during Jesus' ministry and may have died some time before Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

Mary, pledged in marriage to Joseph, became pregnant after God's angel told her the wonderful news that through the power of the Holy Spirit she would conceive and give birth to God's son. The angel named him Jesus, because in him God was to save people from their sins. Mary became the wife of Joseph and together they journeyed to Bethlehem for the census. While there she gave birth to Jesus, who was visited by shepherds from the surrounding fields and wise men from the distant east. Mary probably lived in Nazareth throughout

Jesus' ministry. At his crucifixion she was at the cross with the other women. She joined the disciples after Jesus' ascension.

Messiah, a Hebrew word meaning "anointed one," was first used for any person anointed with holy oil – priest, king, or chosen one. Later, by the time of Jesus, the term Messiah had come to designate the one God would anoint to deliver the people and establish the Kingdom. When Jesus came to be known as the Messiah, he was given the title "Christ," the Greek term for "anointed one."

Nazareth, a small village in the region of Galilee, was the home of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. All the references to Nazareth in the Bible are found in the New Testament, and all are used in connection with Jesus, who is identified nineteen times as "Jesus of Nazareth." Mary was living in Nazareth when she received the announcement from the angel Gabriel, and after Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary returned home to Nazareth to live. (Luke 1:26; 2:39-40)

Purification. Forty days after the birth of a male child Jewish mothers underwent the ritual of purification. (Leviticus 12:2-8) A lamb was offered as a sacrifice, or if the parents could not afford a lamb, a pair of pigeons or doves could be substituted. Mary went to the Temple to be purified after the birth of Jesus. Rules about ritual purity were not restricted to childbirth.

Savior is a term that means one who delivers from danger. In the Old Testament the term is used for the judges and other leaders who save the people in times of crisis. It is used especially of God, who delivers Israel from bondage and threats of destruction. In Luke 2:11 the angels announce the birth of Jesus by telling the shepherds that "a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord" has been born in Bethlehem.

Simeon, a devout Jew, had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would see God's Messiah. When Mary and Joseph presented Jesus in the Temple, Simeon recognized him at once as the Messiah and knew the promise had been kept. (Luke 2:22-35)

Wise Men, astrologers from the East, unacquainted with the scriptural prophecy of the location of the Messiah's birth, came to worship the child they believed to be the new king of the Jews. They are identified in the *Today's English Version* as "men who study the stars," and in the *New International*

Version as “Magi,” from the Greek root meaning “magic.” Traditionally, especially in Christmas legends and carols, they have been called “the Three Kings,” although Matthew does not indicate their number. (Matthew 2:1-6)

The Search Begins

The story told in the passages below is a familiar one for many people. However, try to read these texts as if you have never encountered them before. Since each of the writers has a distinctive witness to share, do not blend the passages together, but try to remember which events appear in Matthew, which in Luke, and which in John. As you read, make notes that help you to retell the story of *The Savior*. Questions to guide your discovery include:

- ◆ *What do the Gospels of Matthew and Luke tell us of Jesus’ birth and childhood?*
- ◆ *In what ways do the stories of Jesus’ birth and childhood anticipate his life and ministry?*
- ◆ *What evidence do you find that Jesus was understood as the fulfillment of the promises, prophecies, and hopes expressed in the Hebrew Scriptures?*

Matthew 1:18-25, The Birth of Jesus

Matthew 2:1-12, Eastern Visitors

Matthew 2:13-23, Egypt: Escape and Return

Luke 1:26-56, Jesus' Birth Is Announced

Luke 2:1-7, The Birth of Jesus

Luke 2:8-20, The Shepherds Visit Jesus

Luke 2:21-38, Jesus, Simeon, and Anna

Luke 2:39-40, Return to Nazareth

Luke 2:41-52, Jesus in the Temple

John 1:1-18, The Word

The Search Continues

◆ *In these readings I have questions about...*

◆ *In these readings I discovered...*

Focusing the Search

You are already aware of the importance of focusing on what the Bible actually says, not what you think it says or may remember it says. When retelling the story of Jesus' birth, we often integrate elements from Matthew and Luke with ideas from movies, plays, songs, works of art, and greeting cards. Sometimes we add things dimly remembered from childhood.

As you prepared "The Search Begins," you read the accounts of Jesus' birth in Matthew and Luke. Without looking back at your notes or at your Bible, write in your own words the story of the birth of Jesus as you remember it. Put in as many details as you can.

Now open your Bible to Matthew 1:18-2:12. Underline or mark with a highlighter everything in your story of the birth of Jesus that comes from this passage. Next, check to see if the remaining material comes from Luke 2:1-20. Draw a line through all of the material that is not based on the biblical narratives. Then consider the following questions:

- ◆ *What did you learn from this exercise?*

- ◆ *What was Matthew emphasizing?*

- ◆ *What was Luke emphasizing?*

- ◆ *Why do you think the accounts have different elements?*

Putting it Together

The writers of the New Testament were convinced that Jesus was the fulfillment of the promises, prophecies, and hopes expressed in the Hebrew Scriptures. Therefore, beginning with the stories of Jesus' birth and continuing through his life, death, and resurrection, they quoted from those Scriptures to indicate the ways Jesus fulfilled God's promises.

For this exercise you need to use a Bible that contains cross-references either as marginal notes or footnotes. As you may recall from the activity on "Focusing the Search" in Discovery 6, cross-references indicate where the same passage, or a parallel reading, is found in other writings in the Bible. Use the following exercise to help you discover how in the passages you read earlier, the Gospel writers interpreted the Scriptures when they told the stories of Jesus' birth.

First, look up and read the Old Testament passage in the left-hand column. In the cross-reference notes for that passage locate the New Testament passage in Matthew, Luke, or John that quotes or refers to this Old Testament “prophecy” and write the book, chapter and verse numbers next to the Old Testament citation. Finally, look up the New Testament reference to see how the prophecy was used by Matthew, Luke, or John.

Old Testament Passages Quoted or Referred to in the Birth Narratives:

New Testament Passage(s):

Micah 5:2

Isaiah 7:14

Isaiah 9:7

As you read the New Testament, you may note some variation from the words of the Hebrew Scripture. That often occurs because a New Testament writer was quoting from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint), while your Bible is a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Sometimes in New Testament cross-references you find the notation LXX in parentheses. This indicates that the quotation is from the Septuagint.

What did you discover in your search about the ways Matthew, Luke, and John viewed Jesus and his fulfillment of the Old Testament?

In each discovery continue to look for ways the New Testament writers indicate that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

Reflection

1. Reflect upon the angel's joyful announcement to the shepherds: "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11)

What was the "good news of great joy" that caused the shepherds to leave their flocks and head into Bethlehem? What do you mean when you call Jesus your Savior?

2. Ponder some of the opening words of John's Gospel: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12)

What do you think of when you hear the words "children of God"? What does it mean to you to be "a child of God"? In what ways have you received and believed Jesus?