



Jesus Is Born

The people of Israel had been waiting for a Savior and a king, and there he was, quietly hidden. Only his parents, some animals, and a few shepherds were there to see him.

It happened in Bethlehem, a town just a few miles from Jerusalem.

Mary and Joseph didn't live in Bethlehem. Their home was in Nazareth, far to the north. But they had to travel to Bethlehem because the Roman government ordered all the people to pay a new tax. To do this, they had to travel back to the town their family came from. Joseph was from the family—the “house”—of David, and the family home was

Bethlehem. So Joseph and his wife, Mary, traveled there.

What a difficult journey it was. It was almost time for Mary to have her baby, so she was probably tired much of the time. And because everyone else was traveling to pay their taxes, the road was crowded and noisy. We know that Bethlehem was busy and crowded. Luke's Gospel tells us:

While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:6–7)

A manger was a feeding trough for animals. Mary had her baby out where the cows and sheep were staying! In Hebrew, *Bethlehem* means “house of bread.” Who could know that this baby would grow up to be the Savior of the world, and he would call himself the “Bread of Life”? For now, Jesus lay there in a manger, which held food for the animals to eat. With only animals to see, God came to earth as a baby.

It is a scene we know well. We've seen paintings of it and movies about it. We have also seen Nativity sets in our own homes and churches. Maybe we've even acted out the Nativity story. More than a thousand years after the birth of Jesus, St. Francis of Assisi thought that seeing the scene of Jesus' birth would help us grow

closer to God. In a small Italian town, St. Francis gathered women, men, children, and animals to create the very first Nativity scene.

Outside Bethlehem, not far from where Jesus lay, shepherds were watching their flocks of sheep. The lives of shepherds were hard. They had to watch their fields day and night and protect their sheep from thieves and predators.

Shepherds were some of the poorest people in Jewish society. They often were outcasts, too. They had to care for animals every day, which meant that they disobeyed religious law by working on the Sabbath. They often had to touch animals that had diseases, and they got bloody sometimes when an animal was injured. Religious law said that a person who touched blood or disease was unclean and could not be close to God or come close to where people worshipped God. So shepherds were outsiders, and people looked down on them.

But the shepherds weren't outcasts to God or the angels.

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For

today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord.” (Luke 2:8–11)

Once again, the angels told people not to be afraid, because there was good news! The Messiah was born! The angels even told the shepherds how to find him:

And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. (Luke 2:12)

How strange! The people were waiting for the Messiah, but in their minds, he would be powerful, and everyone would know it was him. But could the Messiah be this newborn baby, wrapped in cloth and lying in a feed trough?

Jesus' humble birth showed us that God does things in ways we don't expect.

Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests. (Luke 2:14)

This is what the angels sang after they shared the good news. It is such good news that we sing it almost every Sunday in Mass, giving glory to God for coming among us and joining heaven to earth!

After the angels left, the shepherds hurried to see Jesus. They told Mary and Joseph what the angels had said. Mary treasured all they had told her. She kept these amazing memories in her heart to think and pray about always.

The shepherds were watching and waiting for signs. When the good news came, they did not waste a moment. They rushed to see Jesus. They hurried as fast as they could. Will we follow the shepherds' example?

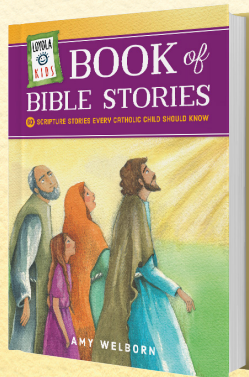
God has made himself small for us. God waits for us. The baby is born! Let us hurry to see him and give glory to God for his love!

Christmas has begun!

**TO READ THE WHOLE STORY IN THE BIBLE,
GO TO LUKE 2:1–20.**

THINK QUIETLY: Think about what a baby is like. Think about what it means that God came to us, born as a baby. Why is this good news?

PRAY TOGETHER: Glory to God in the highest! And peace to all people on earth!



EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE AS A FAMILY!

Loyola Kids Book of Bible Stories by popular children's author Amy Welborn is a beautifully illustrated collection of Bible stories arranged in a uniquely Catholic way—based on the liturgical year and the order in which they are proclaimed during Mass.

WWW.LOYOLAPRESS.COM

AMY WELBORN is the author of *Loyola Kids Book of Saints*, *Loyola Kids Book of Heroes*, and more than 20 other books for Catholic children, teens, and adults.

ALSO AVAILABLE:



A CHRISTMAS BIBLE STORY

