

Shepherds and Wise Men

MEMORY VERSE:

"They saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him"

Matthew 2:11

Not long after John was born, the Roman Emperor decided to count all the people in his country. To do this, everyone was ordered to go to the town where they had been born. Joseph was from Bethlehem, so Mary and Joseph had to pack up and walk there.

It was a journey that took a few days and by the time Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, Mary, who was expecting her baby to be born any time, was very tired. Bethlehem was usually a quiet little town. It was in a valley with hills all around. But now there were so many people in Bethlehem, that there was nowhere for them to rest. All day the innkeepers had been squeezing in extra people who had come to Bethlehem to be counted. The only place where there was any room at all was in the stable with the animals. Mary and Joseph looked at each other. They were so tired that even a stable would be good.

It was warm and dry in the stable and Mary and Joseph rested on the clean straw. Later that night another little cry was heard; the baby Jesus was born. Mary carefully wrapped him in warm blankets and put him to sleep in the manger. Together Mary and Joseph thanked God for the safe arrival of their little one.

Suddenly there came a soft knocking on the door. When Joseph opened it, he found some excited shepherds waiting there. They explained that they had been outside looking after their sheep when suddenly a great light appeared in the sky, and angels had told them about the birth of a Saviour in the city of David. They would find him wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. The angels began to sing and praise God, and the shepherds left their sheep in the field to go and find the special baby.

They went in quietly to see the little baby lying in the straw. They had to go back to their sheep, but as they went they told everyone they met about the very special baby born in the stable.

Miles and miles away from Bethlehem, across the desert lived some wise men. They were wise probably because they read the parts of the Bible that were available and had worked out that a very important King was to be born in Israel. When they saw a very bright star in the sky they knew it was the sign of his birth.

Quickly they prepared for a long journey, gathered some presents for the baby and set off for Jerusalem. They journeyed for weeks until they finally reached the palace of King Herod who was then the king. They asked him where the baby was that had been born to be King of the Jews so they could go and worship him. Of course, Herod didn't know. He called some of the Jewish religious leaders together and asked them where this King was to be born. When they told him Bethlehem, he sent the wise men there telling them to come back and tell him when they found him.

When the wise men started off to Bethlehem, they saw the star again and followed it to the house where Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus were. They had moved into a house from the stable when the crowds had left Bethlehem.

The wise men were pleased to see Jesus and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. God warned them to go home by a different way and not to go back to Herod. Herod was a jealous man and didn't like the idea that someone was planning on taking his place as King. When he realized the wise men were not coming back he ordered all the children under two years of age to be killed. But God had told Joseph and Mary to take Jesus to Egypt and they lived there safely until Herod had died.

Things to Remember

- The shepherds were quick to believe and act.
- The Bible can tell us some things that will happen in the future.
- Men cannot foil God's plans.

Discussion

The birth of Jesus showed what God considers important. He chose a young faithful woman, and a man who was willing to believe and act when God asked him to. He chose for Jesus to be born in a stable in very humble circumstances, perhaps surrounded by beasts of service. He chose shepherds out in the fields to be the first to know about the birth of the Saviour of the world. God values faith and trust in Him, not the riches of the world and wisdom of man.

1. Why were Joseph and Mary going to Bethlehem?
2. What did the shepherds see in the sky?
3. What were the wise men doing in Jerusalem?

Activity Suggestions

Draw a picture of the angels singing using white crayon. Paint over it with slightly watered down black or blue paint. When dry, add some glitter for stars.

Make a beaded star: (2 pipe cleaners, sparkling beads, fishing line)
Cut pipecleaners in half. Holding 3, twist together in centre. Spread apart to make star shape. Thread on beads and fold over ends. Hang.

This is the Hillside

This is the hillside that's not very steep. (Touch fingertips forming gentle slope)

Theses are the shepherds who are minding their sheep (Hold up fingers of one hand)
Out on the hillside that's not very steep.

This is the light that shone very bright (Both hands with fingers spread wide)
Over the shepherds who are minding their sheep
Out on the hillside that's not very steep.

This is the angel who came in the night (Hold up index finger)
Surrounded by light that shone very bright

Over the shepherds who are minding their sheep
Out on the hillside that's not very steep.

This is the place where the baby lay (Cradle arms)
Said the angel who came in the night
Surrounded by light that shone very bright
Over the shepherds who are minding their sheep
Out on the hillside that's not very steep.

This how they ran all the way (Run with fingers)
To see the place where the baby lay
Told by the angel who came in the night
Surrounded by light that shone very bright
Over the shepherds who are minding their sheep
Out on the hillside that's not very steep.