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JESUS SAVES



What's something you'd love to add to your celebration of Christmas?

QUESTION #1

#BSFLJesus

THE POINT

*Jesus was born to bring us
into a relationship with God.*



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

There's no doubt that Hawaii is one of the most beautiful places on earth. Given that reality, many people are surprised to learn that, during the 1800s, one of its islands housed a leper colony. Hawaiians who contracted Hansen's disease were sent to the island of Molokai to be quarantined.

One Roman Catholic priest named Damien saw the beauty not only of the island, but also the forgotten people who lived there. Father Damien made Molokai his home for sixteen years, choosing to live among the lepers, preach the gospel, and serve them. He used a variety of methods to restore a sense of community to the people of Molokai, but he was still an outsider. When he preached, he often started his sermons by saying, "You lepers..."

Then, a day came when Father Damien started to preach with a new phrase: "We lepers..." He had contracted the disease himself.¹

In a similar way, God came to earth to live among us and say, "We humans." Jesus became one of us. That's what Christmas is all about.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Luke 2:4-7

⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

King David has always been one of the most important figures in Jewish history. He was the ideal example of a God-fearing king—a fearless warrior who trusted the Lord to protect him even against staggering odds. (See 1 Sam. 17:40-52; 18:5.) More importantly, David was a man after God’s own heart. (See 1 Sam. 13:14.) God promised David: “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever” (2 Sam. 7:16). The eternal King, the Anointed One from God, would come from David’s lineage.

Imagine being taught as a child: “Just wait. Our Deliverer is coming, and He’s coming from King David’s lineage.” In Joseph’s day, generations had waited a thousand years for this special King to come to power. And wouldn’t you know it? Joseph was a part of that lineage. (See Matt. 1:1-16.)

Because Caesar Augustus wanted a census taken of his entire empire, Joseph had to report back to the town of his ancestors. That meant traveling to Bethlehem, “the city of David.” Making the approximately ninety-mile trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem posed several challenges for Joseph. For example, his fiancée was pregnant. In fact, Mary was far along in her pregnancy, which meant her son could be born at any moment. What’s more, Joseph wasn’t the only one called back to his homeland. The roads and towns were filled with travelers returning home for the census, which left no housing for Joseph and Mary.

What do you find most surprising in these verses?

QUESTION #2

The timing for this whole journey just seemed to be “off.” The circumstances appeared to be working against Joseph and Mary, but all this was right in line with God’s plan and timing: “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5).

It’s good to plan, but things don’t always go according to our timing. God is at work behind the scenes of our lives, just as He was with Joseph and Mary. We shouldn’t focus so closely on how we want things to happen that we miss what God is doing in the bigger picture. God is in control, so trusting Him to be in charge of the plan and the timing isn’t just wise—it’s crucial.

Luke 2:8-14

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

Being a shepherd was a decent way to earn a living, but it wasn’t easy work. Shepherds were on guard 24/7, had to have a wide range of skills to care for their flock, and probably got weary of constantly counting their sheep. Many shepherds were responsible for a good number of sheep (which meant being in charge of considerable wealth), but their job was regarded as lowly.

What do these verses teach us about the purpose of Jesus’ birth?

QUESTION #3

Shepherds were once prominent in Israel—Abraham, Moses, and David had all been shepherds. Over time, however, shepherds lost their social standing. By the time of the New Testament, shepherds weren't even allowed to testify in legal hearings because their testimonies were considered invalid.

Yet it was this very group—men low on the social scale doing dirty jobs—to which God announced the arrival of Jesus. When the angel of the Lord appeared to these shepherds, they were “filled with great fear.” I'm sure we can't fathom the depth of fear in these exhausted, cold shepherds as the dark night suddenly lit up like the brightest day and a glorious angel began to speak.

Thankfully, the angel spoke a message that was far from fearful: the Savior had been born! This Savior is the Messiah, the promised One from long ago. The glory of God Himself was wrapped in human flesh, and creation could do nothing but rejoice.

The angel didn't go to a political leader, Caesar's palace, or the temple where priests were going about their priestly duties. Instead, the angel went straight to those in the lowliest position. To these men who tended lambs, the angel announced salvation had come into the world.

The news was too good for just one angel. He was suddenly joined by a multitude of angels. Praise filled the sky as they proclaimed, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”



What steps can we take to experience peace during the Christmas season?

QUESTION #4

Luke 2:15-20

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

I’ve known people who witnessed plane crashes, skiers who saw avalanches, and park visitors who felt the heat from out-of-control forest fires. Each of these people had something in common: once they had an audience, the first thing out of their mouths was, “Wait until I tell you what I saw!”

As soon as the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds hurried off to see for themselves what had happened in Bethlehem. When they arrived in the town, they were unable to contain their excitement. They eagerly retold the story, and “all who heard it wondered.”

Mary’s reaction was more subdued. Rather than making loud proclamations, she simply “treasured up all these things.” Luke told us she was also “pondering them.” Mary didn’t know it yet, but the road ahead would be tough. I wonder how many times she returned to meditating on all the miraculous and wondrous things that happened at Jesus’ birth.

Like Mary, we will have times when things get tough *because* of our connection to Jesus. In those moments, we should stop and reflect on the miraculous things we’ve experienced in Christ. We may not always understand what’s happening, but meditating on the work of Christ will help us keep trusting Him.

Mary treasured and meditated; the shepherds proclaimed. These are actions all followers of Jesus need to take, as well. Our task is simple: proclaim all that we’ve seen, heard, and experienced to whoever will listen.

What steps can we take to glorify God during the Christmas season?

QUESTION #5

DID YOU KNOW?

Listen to the song "Mary Did You Know?", by Mark Lowry. (You can find a link to purchase the song at our blog, biblestudiesforlife.com/adultextra.) Use the space below to record your emotions and thoughts as you listen. What are some specific lines of the song that catch your attention?

What are some steps you can take to "treasure" your relationship with Jesus during this Christmas season?

*"Jesus became what we are that
He might make us what He is!"*

—ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA

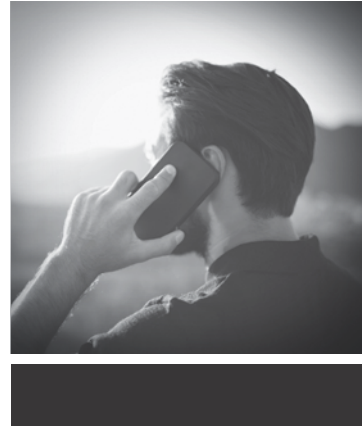
LIVE IT OUT

How will Jesus' birth influence your actions and attitudes this week? Consider taking one or more of the following steps:

- ▶ **Treasure.** Think on the things you've seen or heard that have confirmed God's reality and power to you. Treasure these moments in your heart so you can recall them when times get rough.
- ▶ **Write.** Write out your testimony—what Jesus has done in your life—and pray about finding one person you can share it with this week.
- ▶ **Celebrate.** Determine one or more ways you can turn the celebration of Christmas into a proclamation of what Christ has done for you. How can you, like the shepherds, proclaim what you've seen and heard about Jesus?

Jesus didn't become part of our world for some cosmic tourism opportunity. He came on a mission to restore our relationships with God. He came to give us an opportunity to connect with God in a meaningful way. How will you respond?

My thoughts



Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLJesus**