

# youthESource Bible Study

## The Nativity Story

by Matt Behrens

Study for use with the film *The Nativity Story* (2006) PG, 1 hour 40 minutes

*Copyright note:* It is recommended that your church secures license to show the film. This can be provided in an annual subscription by <http://www.cvli.com/>

### Note to Leaders

The format here is pretty simple. Each week opens with a couple Bible references to read. Then I suggest watching the movie. I've indicated starting and ending points which should provide about 25 minutes of video for each session (week 4 might be a little shorter). Following the movie I have suggested a couple discussion questions stemming from the movie. These are all suggestions for you to use. Feel free to come up with some of your own questions as well. You may notice things in the movie that I did not, or your group may want to discuss something that moves in a different direction. That's okey-dokey.

In preparation for each week, I would recommend reading the Bible passages associated with the study. If you want to be better prepared for the movie discussion, you can read the entire birth narratives from Matthew (1:18-2:18) and Luke (1:1-2:21).

### *A Note on Combining Gospel Accounts of the Christmas Events*

Matthew and Luke are the only gospels which record events of Jesus' life prior to His baptism by John. Each account is selective in the details provided and the events recorded. Because the two do not relate any of the same events it is difficult to place all the events of the Christmas story into one time line (possibly the most difficult piece is the visit of the magi). However, the movie will depict one possibility. If you want to find more information on difficulties and theories on harmonizing the birth accounts of Jesus these books may be helpful: *Concordia Commentary on Matthew 1:1-11:1* by Jeffrey A. Gibbs  
*In the Fullness of Time* by Paul Maier

### Week One

Read Jeremiah 23:5-6.

What is promised here? Has this been fulfilled? (Yes – Jesus was born as the “righteous branch” from David's line; but also not yet because Christ is coming again in glory and His rule as king will be known fully at that time.)

Read Luke 1:5-25.

God chose Zechariah and Elizabeth to be part of His plan. How did He let them know? (He sent the angel Gabriel.) In His plan, God has chosen you as well. How has He let you know this? (Baptism, being told by parents & others, through the Bible, pastors' words, any and every place the gospel is spoken to us.)

Read Luke 1:26-38.

During the Middle Ages it was popularly thought that Mary was a princess from a very well-to-do family (see Martin Luther's sermon, “Annunciation,” printed in Martin Luther's Christmas Book, The Westminster Press, 1948). Most of our contemporary accounts of the Christmas story make Mary to be poor. What do you think of this? What clues do we find in the Bible? (Nazareth was not known as a royal town. The best Biblical counter to the idea of Mary being wealthy is Isaiah 53:2.)

Watch movie until Mary leaves home to visit Elizabeth (follows Mary's encounter with Gabriel).

Discuss

- Who are the major characters introduced in the film?
- Do you think events and people in the movie are an accurate reflection of what we can read in the Bible?

- Were there any parts of the film you had trouble understanding?
- If you were making the movie, what would you do differently?
- Where is the work of God evident in the story?

Close with prayer.

## Week Two

Read Luke 1:39-45 and 1:57-66.

How many items does Luke include in these sections which are evidence of God's hand at work? (See how many things the group can list.)

Background Info for Today's Movie Clip

- What is the meaning of "Messiah"? (Hebrew word for "anointed one")
- Prior to Jesus' birth, what concepts of "Messiah" were prevalent in Jewish thought? (God had promised a Messiah who would sit on David's throne as a king, he would bring justice and righteousness, he would be a savior...)
- We will see a little more of King Herod today and during the next couple sessions. The movie's portrayal of Herod is probably very accurate concerning his character. Note this from New Testament scholar Robert H. Stein (from *Jesus the Messiah: A Survey of the Life of Christ*):  
 "[Herod] was paranoid concerning his rule. He not only built fortresses such as Antonia in Jerusalem, Sebaste, Caesarea, Gaba, Heshbon, Masada and Herodium for his protection, but he ruthlessly slaughtered anyone he suspected of being involved in political intrigue against him. He drowned Aristobolus III and executed Hyrcanus II, two high priests. He killed his uncle Joseph, his mother-in-law (Alexandra), his sons Alexander and Aristobolus, his favorite wife (Mariamne) and Antipater, the son he had chosen to succeed him, because he thought they were trying to overthrow him. As he was dying in the fortress of Herodium, he had the leading citizens of his kingdom gathered in the amphitheater of Jericho. Then he ordered that upon his death all these citizens be killed so that his death would be mourned! (Fortunately, the order was never carried out.)"

Watch the movie beginning at chapter 8. End viewing after scene with the Magi on their camels (follows Joseph's dream and his reuniting with Mary).

Discuss

- What did we learn about Herod in this part of the movie?
- What do you think of Joseph's character as the movie portrays him? How much of what we saw is from the Bible? (If you're not sure, look at Matthew chapter 1 for most of what we know about Joseph in connection to the Christmas story.) What kind of guy is Joseph, according to the movie? (He's a loving husband, willing to sacrifice for his family and wanting to do what is right before God.) In what way might the movie be using Joseph, the father, to give us a picture of God, our heavenly Father? (God loves us selflessly. He loves sacrificially. That's why He was willing to endure the pain of losing his Son. God is loving and righteous and will always do what is right according to those standards.)
- When Mary is speaking with her parents she says, "Whether you believe is your choice, not mine." Mary is saying that she has no choice but to believe. How is this true for us as well? (We didn't choose God. He chose us. Now that we know His love for us it would be an absurdity to walk away from Him.)

Close with prayer.

## Week Three

Read Matthew 1:18-25.

How were these events portrayed in the film last week?

Read Luke 2:1-5.

How many miracles are recorded in these verses? (None.) Where is God at work in these verses? (His plans and the words of his prophets are being fulfilled. The promised Messiah, Jesus, would be born in Bethlehem as a descendant of King David.)

Watch movie beginning at chapter 13. Stop movie after the Magi visit Herod.

## Discuss

- Read Matthew 2:1-10.
- Who are the magi, according to the movie? (They are followers of the true God.) How much of this is from the Bible and how much was from the filmmaker's imagination? (We really do not know from the Bible what their faith and religious background might have been.)
- As this part of the movie began, Herod declared a census, instructing his men that they were looking for a "man of power." In what ways was Jesus the opposite of what people expected Him to be? (He was born humbly, not with great riches or power.)
- As we live our lives "in Christ" we sometimes expect our lives to be filled with God's power. In what ways is our life "in Christ" often the opposite of what we might expect it to be?
- Read Isaiah 53:2-3. What was prophesied about the Servant God promised to send? How did Jesus fulfill this prophecy?

Close with prayer.

## Week Four

Read Luke 2:1-20.

What did the Shepherds do to be chosen for this good news? How did they respond to being chosen?

Read Matthew 2:9-12.

Why would the magi be directed away from Herod? (Remember what we learned the last two weeks about Herod's paranoia concerning his rule.)

Read Matthew 2:13-18.

Do we read this part of the story on Christmas? Should we include this as part of the Christmas story? (This story can highlight the weakness and fragility of Jesus in His state of humiliation. Though He is fully God and Man in one Person, He is nonetheless vulnerable to Herod's soldiers and dependent upon Joseph for protection. The story further contrasts Herod, the earthly king, with Jesus, the true King. Also, we are reminded of the broken nature of the world Jesus came to redeem. These are some of the reasons for including this as part of the Christmas story.)

Watch movie from chapter 18 until credits.

## Discuss

- Were there any pieces of the Christmas story missing? Would you have shown anything differently if you were making this movie?
- Read Isaiah 49:5-6. How does the story of the magi bring fulfillment of this prophecy? How does your faith in Christ bring fulfillment of this prophecy?
- What role does Egypt play throughout the history of God's people? (Joseph and his family took refuge there during famine. Later, God rescued his people Israel and brought a new nation out of Egypt in the Exodus.) The flight to Egypt is recorded in Matthew's gospel. One of the themes in Matthew is that Jesus is "Israel reduced to one." How is that theme significant as we think about Joseph, Mary and Jesus becoming refugees in Egypt?

Close with prayer.

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