

## **A Christmas “Special Report”**

### **Instructions:**

Print one copy of each of the following pages and hand them out to individuals or groups/tables ahead of time. Ask the participants/groups to read their paper and prepare to answer questions, as they will role-play the person their paper describes. (Groups can pick one person from their group as a spokesperson.)

A staff person or volunteer will then act as an investigative reporter who is following a lead about the birth of an important king. He or she will interview each participant with some or all of the questions they prepared to answer. (For the sake of time, the interviewer can fill in some of the “detail” answers and focus on the key questions.

Explain in closing that this miracle, which was hundreds of years in the making, is the reason followers of Christ celebrate at Christmas and all year long, each time we gather together for fellowship. It is not just an important story. It is the MOST important story that any of us will ever hear.

## Isaiah

Isaiah lived in about 700 BC. Isaiah was known by his people (the Jews in the nation of Israel) as a prophet who spoke and wrote messages from God. People believed this, because Isaiah wrote many things about their future that came true. For example, he wrote very bad news that the Assyrian Empire would conquer Israel and take them away as slaves. This happened several years later, and Isaiah's writings were kept and copied by the Jewish people ever since. Ancient copies of his writings are still in museums today, and they are copied and translated as part of the Jewish holy books, and the Christian Bible.

Isaiah also wrote many details about a special man who would be born (perhaps hundreds of years later). In some of Isaiah's writings, the special man is described as a perfect King who will rule and bless the whole world with peace and justice. But he also wrote something else about that man – a description that sounds very different from a king...

**“He was not beautiful and he did not seem like a king. We had no interest in him. We looked at him. But there was nothing to cause us to want him. People did not like him. And they caused him to go away. He was a man who often felt very sad. And he knew what pain felt like. He was like someone from whom people hid their faces. People did not like him. And we decided that he was worth nothing.**

**Surely, he lifted up our pain from us! And he carried our sadness. But we thought that God had punished him with pain and suffering. They pierced him, but we had done the wrong things. They hurt him and they broke him because of our sins. They gave him the punishment that brought peace to us. His wounds have given us health. We have all gone away, like sheep. Each of us has turned to his own way. And the LORD has put all our sins on him.”**

So God showed Isaiah that this special man would not look at all like a great king. Also, he would suffer great pain and death in order to bring peace and life to the world.

Isaiah did not know when this would happen. It must have seemed to Isaiah as if this promise was never to going to come true, because the special man who matched all his detailed descriptions was not born during his lifetime.

**Prepare to answer the following questions during the program from Isaiah's point of view:**

1. When and where did you live?
2. What special ability did you have?
3. How did you prove to people that you had this ability?
4. What evidence is there today (in 2007 AD) that you had this ability? (hint: in museums)
5. What predictions did you make about a special man?

## Micah

Micah lived about 700 years before the time of Jesus. Micah was known by his people, the Jews in the nation of Israel, as a prophet who spoke and wrote messages from God. People believed this because the things he wrote about their future came true. He wrote very bad news that a powerful enemy would conquer Israel and take them away as slaves. This terrible time came several years later when the Assyrian Empire conquered them. Micah's writings were kept and copied by the Jewish people ever since. Ancient copies of his writings are still in museums today, and they are copied and translated as part of the Jewish holy books, and the Christian Bible.

Micah also wrote about something that would not happen until hundreds of years later. This is what he wrote:

**“Bethlehem is only a little town, among all the many towns in Judah, God says. 'But I will choose someone who is born there. He will rule Israel for me. Long, long ago, I prepared for him to come.' [...]”**  
**“And this ruler will stay strong because the Lord will make him strong. He will supply what his people need. He will be like a man who supplies everything for his sheep. He will rule with authority from the Lord his God, and his people will be safe. So then, all over the world, people will know that he is great.”**

So God told Micah that a kind, fair, and powerful king would be born in a small town called Bethlehem. He said that God planned this long before Micah's time. He said the king would take care of his people. He would rule in God's power. He would be known all over the world as a great king.

Micah did not know when this would happen. It must have seemed to Micah as if this promise was never to going to come true, because no such king was born during Micah's lifetime.

**Prepare to answer the following questions during the program from Micah's point of view:**

1. When and where did you live?
2. What special ability did you have?
3. Why did people believe that you had this ability?
4. What evidence is there today (in 2007 AD) that you had this ability? (hint: in museums)
5. What predictions did you write about a king?

## Wise Men

Near the beginning of the first century AD, there was a group of “Wise Men” (also called “Kings” or “Magi”) who lived in a country far to the east of Israel – possibly in Persia. These men were most likely astrologers, which means that they studied the stars in the belief that they would find special meanings to understand world events or the future.

A special star that they saw in the western sky caused the Wise Men to conclude that a great king had been born for the Jews. They decided to travel the long distance to Jerusalem, the “capital city” of Israel. Israel was ruled by the Roman Empire at that time, but it was also the homeland of the Jews.

When they arrived in Jerusalem, the Wise Men went first to King Herod, who was appointed the ruler over Israel by the Roman Emperor. The Wise Men explained to King Herod about the special star that they saw, and about the star’s special meaning. They asked Herod where the new King of the Jews had been born.

Herod seemed surprised, but later told the Wise Men that they should look in Bethlehem for the child. When they went to Bethlehem, the special star pointed them to a very ordinary house, where a builder named Joseph lived with his wife, Mary, and their little son, Jesus. The Wise Men were filled with joy to find Jesus, and they bowed to him as a great king. They gave Jesus expensive gifts of gold, perfume, and spices before they left to return to their own country.

**Prepare to answer the following questions during the program from one of the Wise Men’s point of view:**

1. When and where did you live?
2. What special skill or interest did you have?
3. What did you see in the sky, and what did you think it meant?
4. How did you find the child?
5. What did you do when you found him?
6. Were you surprised about what you found?

## Elizabeth

Elizabeth was the wife of a very important man in the city of Jerusalem (in Israel) near the beginning of the first century. Her husband, Zechariah, was a Jewish priest who led the Jews in worshipping God in the Jewish temple. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth were too old now to have any children, and they were unable to have any children when they were younger, even though they wanted to very much.

One day in the temple, Zechariah saw an angel. The angel told Zechariah that he and Elizabeth would have a special son through a miracle, even though they were too old. He said that their son would be a prophet to prepare people for another, even more special man whom God would send. He told Zechariah to name his son John. Zechariah could not believe this, so the angel said that he would not be able to speak until the child's birth, as a sign to him that God had done this.

Elizabeth did become pregnant in her old age! When she was six months pregnant, her cousin, named Mary, came for a visit. An angel had told Mary that she, too, would have a miracle baby – without even having sex with a man. When they saw each other, the baby inside Elizabeth jumped, and Elizabeth said excitedly with a loud voice that Mary would be blessed to be called the mother of her Lord.

After Elizabeth gave birth, Zechariah wrote on a tablet, "His name is John." After that, he was able to speak again. Everyone who knew them was amazed, and they all wondered what the child would do when he grew up.

**Prepare to answer the following questions during the program from Elizabeth's point of view:**

1. When and where did you live?
2. How old are you and your husband, and what problem did you have?
3. What miracle happened to you?
4. What special visitor came to you when you were pregnant?
5. What did you say to her when you first saw her? Why did you say it?

## Herod “the Great”

Near the beginning of the first century, the nation of Israel was ruled by the Roman Empire, who had appointed a ruthless politician named Herod to be the local ruler. Among other things, Herod was obsessed with large-scale building projects, many of which he named after himself or his family members to insure his greatness would be remembered.

One day, Herod was visited at his Jerusalem palace by a group of rich travelers from the east – possibly from Persia. The travelers told Herod that a special star had shown them that a King of the Jews would be born at this time. They wanted to find this new king, so they could meet and honor him. Supposing it might have been Herod’s child, they asked if Herod knew where he was.

Herod was surprised, and a little shocked at this news. He was also very afraid of anyone trying to replace him or his family as king. He called together religious leaders of the Jews, and experts in the ancient Jewish writings to ask them where such a king would be born. The experts told him about promises in the Jewish writings from hundreds of years earlier, which said that the greatest king of all would be born in the small town of Bethlehem.

Herod told this to the rich visitors, and he lied to them, saying that he, too, wanted to honor the new king. He asked them to come back and tell him if they find the child. When the visitors never returned, Herod ordered for all boys in Bethlehem who were two years old or younger to be killed, to make sure that a new king would not replace him.

**Prepare to answer the following questions during the program from Herod’s point of view:**

1. When and where did you live?
2. What special position do you have?
3. What important things have you accomplished?
4. What is one of your greatest fears?
5. What visitors from an eastern country came to visit you, and what did they want?
6. How did you find the answer to their question?
7. What did you do after they left?

## Mary

Near the beginning of the first century, a young Jewish woman named Mary lived in a small town called Nazareth in the country of Israel. Although her family was descended from King David – the great king of Israel one thousand years earlier – Mary's family was poor and simple. Mary was an average girl, but faithful follower of God.

According to their customs, Mary was promised by her family to be married to a young builder named Joseph. But before their marriage was complete, an angel appeared to her with an amazing message. The angel told her that she would become pregnant before she ever had sex. The angel said that her son would be named Jesus, that he would be called the Son of the Most High God, and that he would become king forever on King David's throne, just as the ancient writings of the Jewish prophets had promised.

Mary was amazed, and she believed the angel's message. She must have been very frightened about what her new husband would think when she became pregnant without him. But an angel spoke to Joseph also, and so they continued with their marriage as the baby grew inside Mary. The angel had told Mary that her cousin, Elizabeth, was pregnant in her old age – also by a miracle of God. Mary went to visit her cousin, and was encouraged that all these things were true. Mary and Elizabeth both knew that God was working miracles inside of them.

When Mary was very close to the time to give birth, the Roman government ordered that every family return to the city or town of their family history, and register with the government there to be counted in a census. So Mary and Joseph made the long journey to Bethlehem, which was the town of their family history. Joseph walked and led a donkey that carried Mary.

When they arrived in Bethlehem, it was crowded with visitors. Mary began to have labor pains, but they could not find a room to rent anywhere. Every place was full. Finally, an inn keeper (hotel manager) told them they could stay outside in the stall where his animals slept. It was there that Mary gave birth to Jesus, and they wrapped him in cloths and used a feeding trough as a bed for the baby.

That night, shepherds found them and told them that angels had appeared to tell them also and told them that Jesus would be the king who would save his people. Mary and Joseph later met other people who were told by God about their miracle – such as an old man at the temple, and rich visitors from a country in the east. Mary treasured all these things in her heart, and wondered what the future would be for her little son.

**Prepare to answer the following questions during the program from Mary's point of view:**

1. When and where did you live?
2. What miracle happened to you?
3. Why did you visit your cousin Elizabeth?
4. Why did you and Joseph travel to Bethlehem, and what happened there?

## Joseph

Near the beginning of the first century, a young Jewish man, a builder named Joseph, lived in a small town called Nazareth in the country of Israel. Although his family was descended from King David – the great king of Israel one thousand years earlier – Joseph's family was poor and simple. Joseph was a kind and faithful young man.

According to their customs, a young woman named Mary was promised to be married to Joseph. But before their marriage was complete, and before Joseph and Mary ever had sex, Mary told Joseph she was pregnant and claimed it was a miracle from God. Joseph was devastated, and planned to quietly stop their plans to be married.

But an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. The angel said that the baby inside Mary was a miracle from God, and that he should not be afraid to marry her. The angel said the baby's name should be Jesus, and that the baby would one day save his people from their sins. Joseph believed the angel, and continued with their marriage. He did not have sex with Mary until after she gave birth to Jesus.

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That night, shepherds found them and told them that angels had appeared to tell them also and told them that Jesus would be the king who would save his people. Mary and Joseph later met other people who were told by God about their miracle – such as an old man at the temple, and rich visitors from a country in the east. All of these things must have given comfort to Joseph that he did the right thing to believe Mary and the angel in his dream, and he must have wondered what the future would be for this little boy that he would raise as his son.

**Prepare to answer the following questions during the program from Joseph's point of view:**

1. When and where did you live?
2. What devastating news did you receive from the woman you were to marry?
3. What did you plan to do next, and why did you change your plans?
4. Why did you and Mary travel to Bethlehem, and what happened there?

## Shepherds

Near the beginning of the first century in the country of Israel, shepherds (keepers of sheep and goats) did hard work that everyone needed done, but few wanted to do. It was hard, lonely work. They usually wandered from place to place and lived in tents. This way, when food supplies got scarce, they would move their animals to higher pastures in the hot summer or to warmer valleys in the winter. Shepherds spent most of their time outside watching over the animals, and often slept near their animals to protect them from robbers and wild animals. When a shepherd went to a town or city, he would be recognized first by his rough appearance and bad smell.

Many sheep were used for sacrifices at the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. It is likely that some of the sheep in the fields around the nearby town of Bethlehem were intended to be offered as temple sacrifices. So there may have been regular contact between these Shepherds and some of the Jewish people who worked in the temple area.

One group of Shepherds were watching their sheep at night near Bethlehem when they were suddenly scared by a huge crowd of angels that lit up the dark night sky, singing glory to God. One of the angels said to the shepherds, "Do not be afraid. Listen! I bring you good news of great joy. Something happened today in the town of David. Someone special was born. It is he who will save you. He is the special man God promised. He is the Lord. I will tell you how you will know this baby. You will find him wrapped in cloths. He is lying in an animal's feeding box."

The shepherds went to Bethlehem as the angel told them, and they found a man named Joseph, and his wife, Mary, in a sheep's stall. Mary had just given birth to a baby named Jesus, whom they had wrapped in cloth and laid in an animal's feeding box just as the Angel said. The shepherds praised God for what they had seen. They must have wondered why God would send a special man this way. It must have seemed strange to them that God chose to show this to them, and not to more important people.

**Prepare to answer the following questions during the program from one of the Shepherds' point of view:**

1. When and where did you live?
2. What is your job, and what is like to do that job?
3. What amazing thing happened while you were watching your sheep?
4. What did you do next, and how did you feel?

## Simeon

Near the beginning of the first century in the country of Israel, the city of Jerusalem was the most important city of all to the Jewish people. It was the home of the Jewish temple, which had been rebuilt by Herod the Great, the Roman ruler of that country, as a way to build good relations with the Jews and to show his own greatness. The temple was, for the Jews, the center of worship since it was first built by the great King Solomon about a thousand years earlier.

The outside areas of the temple were filled with activities of worship - especially animal sacrifices that were meant to pay for man's sins (bad or selfish thoughts or actions). But the sins never really went away. The sacrifices seemed only to remind them that something much better was needed to take away sins.

Some Jews knew and believed the ancient writings of the Jewish prophets that were written hundreds of years earlier. They believed in God's promises to send a special man – a man who would somehow be God in human flesh – a man who would take away man's sin and bring peace and life forever as a perfect king. They knew from those promises that the time was coming soon, and they waited, and watched.

One such man was named Simeon. Simeon was very old, but he had been told by God's Spirit that he would not die until he had seen God's special promised man. One day, Simeon was at the temple. An ordinary man named Joseph, and his wife Mary were among the many people there that day. Mary had given birth just few months before in the nearby town of Bethlehem, and they were bringing their son to the temple to dedicate him to God according to custom.

When Simeon saw their baby, named Jesus, he said out loud to God, "Master, you have done what you promised to your servant. Now, I can die with no trouble in my mind. Now I really have seen the person that will save people. You have sent him to earth so that everyone will know about him. He will be like a light to all people." Joseph and Mary were amazed when they heard what Simeon said.

**Prepare to answer the following questions during the program from Simeon's point of view:**

1. When and where did you live?
2. How old are you? (Young, old, or very old?)
3. What did God promise through the ancient Jewish prophets?
4. What special promise did you personally receive from God?
5. How did that promise come true?
6. How did you respond?

## **Inn Keeper**

Near the beginning of the first century, the country of Israel was ruled by the Roman Empire. The Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, wanted a count of how many people were under Roman rule. He ordered that every family register with the government at the town of their own family origin.

One such town was Bethlehem, a very small town about 10 km south of Jerusalem. Bethlehem's only real importance at that time was that it was the birthplace of Israel's famous king David about one thousand years earlier, and it was also the place where David was first crowned as king. During the time of this census, there would have been many visiting travelers in towns like Bethlehem, perhaps far more than the town had capacity or facilities to host.

One very crowded night, a keeper of an inn (possibly just a large house where rooms were rented to visitors) was busy hosting a full house of visitors, when another knock came on the door. The man knocking was named Joseph, and he asked for a room for the night for himself and his pregnant wife, Mary. All the rooms inside the house were full, but Mary was about to give birth. So the inn keeper offered them a place in a crude shelter outside where the animals were kept. There, Mary gave birth to a baby boy, whom they named Jesus. They wrapped him in clothes and used the animals' feeding box as a bed for the baby.

The strangest part happened later that night, when an excited group of shepherds came to the shelter looking for a baby in an animal's feeding box. They spoke of seeing angles in the sky telling them good news of a special baby being born.

**Prepare to answer the following questions during the program from the Inn Keeper's point of view:**

1. When and where did you live?
2. What job did you have, and why was it crowded this particular night?
3. Who came looking for a room after the house was full, and what did you do?
4. Who came to visit the baby, and why did they come?