

God With Us

The Annunciation

NARRATOR: Imagine the stars in the sky, the countless constellations, the sprawling solar system. And among it a little planet called Earth. God made all of those things, and all of the people and inhabitants of our planet. Just over two thousand years ago, when we most needed him, God came down to be with us, to save us and show us how life should be lived.

He could have chosen anywhere to be his home. He could have built a palace for himself that would have made the grandeur of the Roman Empire seem like nothing. But he didn't. God chose to send his Son to be born among the forgotten the overlooked, and the poor. This is the story of how God came to be with us.

The story opens with a young woman in her home – Mary. Unless you look a bit deeper, there is nothing particularly remarkable about Mary. She was from a town called Nazareth, and she was engaged to be married to Joseph. But, to God, she was very important. So important that God sent an angel down from heaven with a message for her.

READER: (Luke 1:26-38)

God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee with a message for a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to Joseph from the family of King David. The angel greeted Mary and said, "You are truly blessed! The Lord is with you."

Mary was confused by the angel's words and wondered what they meant. Then the angel told Mary, "Don't be afraid! God is pleased with you, and you will have a son. His name will be Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of God Most High. The Lord God will make him king, as his ancestor David was. He will rule the people of Israel forever, and his kingdom will never end."

Mary asked the angel, “How can this happen? I am not married!”

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come down to you, and God’s power will come over you. So your child will be called the holy Son of God. Your relative Elizabeth is also going to have a son, even though she is old. No one thought she could ever have a baby, but in three months she will have a son. Nothing is impossible for God!”

Mary said, “I am the Lord’s servant! Let it happen as you have said.” And the angel left her.

NARRATOR: The angel went away, leaving Mary amazed and excited about this news of the baby, and she told Joseph – the man she was about to marry – all about it.

READER: (Luke 2:1-4) Not long afterward, the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, who ruled over the land, sent an order saying he wanted to count every single person in the country. Everyone had to go back to their home town to be registered. So Joseph had to leave Nazareth in Galilee and go to Bethlehem in Judea. Long ago Bethlehem had been King David’s hometown, and Joseph went there because he was from David’s family.

NARRATOR: Because Mary was engaged to Joseph, she went with him to Bethlehem. The trip was long – about 100 miles. To make the trip easier for Mary, she rode on a donkey.

(Mary and Joseph come forward while the song is sung)

SONG: He Came Down

ELW #253

1. He came down that we may have love;
He came down that we may have love;
He came down that we may have love; hallelujah forevermore.
2. He came down that we may have light;
He came down that we may have light;
He came down that we may have light; hallelujah forevermore.

3. He came down that we may have peace;
He came down that we may have peace;
He came down that we may have peace; hallelujah forevermore.
4. He came down that we may have joy;
He came down that we may have joy;
He came down that we may have joy; hallelujah forevermore.

No Room in the Inn/The Innkeeper Provides the Stable

NARRATOR: When Mary and Joseph finally arrived in Bethlehem, it was almost time for Mary to have her baby. They knocked on every door in the town, looking for a place to stay – but everywhere the town was full of people! Lots and lots of people had come to Bethlehem to be counted. Every time they knocked on a door, they got the same answer: no room. Mary and Joseph were just about ready to give up. There was one place left to try. Desperately, Joseph explained to an innkeeper that Mary was going to have a baby very soon. Even though he had no room to give them, the innkeeper did have some space out back in the stable with the animals. There was clean hay and straw, and it was pretty private. Gratefully, Joseph accepted the man's offer. Joseph and Mary went to stay in the stable.

Jesus is Born

READER: (Luke 1:6-7) And while they were there, Mary gave birth to her first-born son. She dressed him in baby clothes and laid him on a bed of hay, because there was no room for them in the inn.

NARRATOR: I'm not sure this was quite what Mary was expecting. The angel said Jesus would be called Son of the Most High. But as she looked at the sleeping baby in the manger, she knew that he was a precious gift.

(Innkeeper and some animals come forward while the song is sung)

1. Away in a manger, no crib for his bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.
2. The cattle are lowing; the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.
I love you, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.
3. Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay
close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in your tender care
and fit us for heaven, to live with you there.

The Angel Announces Jesus' Birth to the Shepherds/The Heavenly Crowd of Angels Appear to the Shepherds

READER: (Luke 2:8-12) That night in the fields near Bethlehem some shepherds were guarding their sheep. All at once an angel came down to them from the Lord, and the brightness of the Lord's glory flashed around them. The shepherds were frightened. But the angel said, "Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. This very day in King David's hometown a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. You will know who he is, because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay."

NARRATOR: Frightened? I'll say, those shepherds were frightened! Scared right out of their wits! You see, shepherds were just ordinary people going about their daily lives. They weren't considered very important. Nobody took much notice of them. So they were surprised – surprised and scared – when the angel spoke to them.

READER: (Luke 2:13-14) Suddenly many other angels came down from heaven and joined in praising God. They said: "Praise God in heaven! Peace on earth to everyone who pleases God."

(Shepherds, Sheep, and Angels come forward while the song is sung)

Song: Hark, the Herald Angels Sing

ELW #270 v. 1&3 only

1. Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn king;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled."
Joyful, all you nations, rise; join the triumph of the skies;
With angelic hosts proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn king!"
3. Hail the heav'n-born Prince of peace! Hail the Sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings, ris'n with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by, born that we no more may die,
Born to raise each child of earth, born to give us second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn king!"

The Angels Depart/Shepherds Go to the Stable/Shepherds Return Praising God

READER: (Luke 2:15 – 20) After the angels had left and gone back to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about." They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and they saw the baby lying on a bed of hay.

When the shepherds saw Jesus, they told his parents what the angel had said about him. Everyone listened and was surprised. But Mary kept thinking about all this and wondering what it meant.

As the shepherds returned to their sheep, they were praising God and saying wonderful things about him. Everything they had seen and heard was just as the angel had said.

NARRATOR: People were amazed to hear the shepherds' story. Are you amazed too? The Son of the Most High, born in a stable? Someone who would be called the Son of God – placed in a dirty manger, with only poor shepherds to greet him? The angels said it was good news for people all over the world.

It's true – the news of Jesus' birth IS good news - especially for people whose lives are the hardest. Imagine: a Savior – God in human flesh – has come to live with us! This God is not far-away, or only for the rich, and the wealthy, and the beautiful people. This God is with us and for us – and that gives all of us hope. Hope to everyone in the world that they are accepted, and loved, and forgiven by him – rich or poor, important or forgotten, and everybody in between.

NARRATOR: Mary, who had seen it all happen, kept these things close to her heart. The shepherds went back to their flocks. But something had changed for the shepherds. They still had work and family – nothing in their lives had really changed. Except them. They changed. They glorified and praised God for the things they had heard and seen. These humble shepherds had their lives transformed through an encounter with Jesus.

(Other villagers and “regular folks” come forward as the song is sung)

Song: O Come, All Ye Faithful

ELW #283 v. 1&2 only

1. O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and adore him, born the king of angels: O come, let us adore him.
O come, let us adore him. O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!
2. The highest, most holy, light of light eternal,
born of a virgin, a mortal he comes;
Son of the Father now in flesh appearing! O come, let us adore him.
O come, let us adore him. O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

Appearance of Star/Wise Ones Visit Herod/Wise Ones Follow Star to the Stable

NARRATOR: Sometime later, more people came to visit. But they didn't come straight to the stable. Three important people – the Three Wise Ones – were very clever and knew all the secrets of the stars. They knew from watching the night skies that an important event was taking place. A bright star rose in the sky (enter star) and they followed it to worship the person whose birth it announced. The Wise Ones knew that the star signaled the birth of the King of the Jews – so they went straight to King Herod's palace in Jerusalem.

READER: (Matthew 2:1-3, 8-10) “Where is the child born to be king of the Jews,” asked the Wise Ones? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.” When King Herod heard about this, he was worried, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. King Herod told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, let me know. I want to go and worship him too.” The Wise Ones listened to what the king said and then left. And the star they had seen in the east went on ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. They were thrilled and excited to see the star.

(The Star and the Wise Ones - and Herod! - come forward as the song is sung)

Song: As With Gladness Men of Old ELW #302 v. 1,2,&3

1. As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold;
As with joy they hailed its light, leading onward, beaming bright;
So, most gracious Lord, may we evermore be led by thee.
2. As with joyful steps they sped, Savior, to thy lowly bed,
There to bend the knee before thee, whom heav’n and earth adore;
So may we with willing feet ever seek thy mercy seat.
3. As they offered gifts most rare at thy cradle, rude and bare,
So may we with holy joy, pure and free from sin’s alloy,
All our costliest treasures bring, Christ to thee, our heav’nly king.

READER: (Matthew 2:11-12) When the Wise Ones went into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother, they knelt down and worshiped him. They took out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and gave them to Jesus. And later, warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back home by another road.

NARRATOR: Tradition says that each of the Wise Ones gave Jesus precious gifts fit for a king: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Today we can bring our gifts to him too. I invite you to come forward and place the offerings of your hearts in the baskets by the manger. Ushers are available to assist you if needed.

(MUSIC while the offering is received)

Song: ELW #296 What Child is This? v.3 only

3. So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh; come, peasant, king, to own him.
The King of kings salvations brings; let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise the song on high, the virgin sings her lullaby;
Joy, joy, for Christ is born, the babe, the son of Mary!

We Share God's Love – Jesus – With the Whole World

NARRATOR: As we've heard, the shepherds' lives were changed by their encounter with Jesus. Perhaps the lives of the Wise Ones were also changed by seeing Jesus face to face. I like to think they learned that some things are worth far more than money, and are not always found in the nicest or richest places. Maybe they even learned that God shows up in unexpected places and in unexpected ways because of just how much God loves us and our world.

When it comes right down to it, that's what Christmas is all about – not reindeer, or santas, or even presents. It's about Love. It's about how God loves everybody – and about how sharing the love of God with friends and strangers is truly good news that brings hope and joy to the whole world!

Song: Joy to the World

ELW #267

1. Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her king;
Let ev'ry heart prepare him room and heav'n and nature sing...
And heav'n and nature sing... and heav'n and heav'n and nature sing.
2. Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns! Let all their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy...
Repeat the sounding joy... repeat, repeat the sounding joy.
3. No more let sin and sorrow grow nor thorns invest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found...
Far as the curse is found... far as, far as the curse is found.
4. He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love...
And wonders of his love... and wonders, wonders of his love.

L: Go in peace. Remember the poor. **C: Thanks be to God!**