

The Christmas Story – Which Gospels?

Which Gospels include narratives of the birth of Jesus?

The narratives of the birth of Jesus can be found in Matthew 1:18 – 2:23, and Luke 1:26-38, 2:1-52

An Angel appears to Joseph to tell him of the impending birth: Matt 1:20-21

An Angel appears to Mary to tell her of the impending birth: Luke 1:30-33

Joseph and Mary live in Galilee, in the town of Nazareth: Luke 1:26

Jesus is born in Judea, in Bethlehem: Matt 2:1, Luke 2:4-7

At the time of Jesus' birth, Mary was a virgin: Matt 1:25, Luke 1:34-35

Jesus was born in a stable/cave surrounded by animals: While Luke mentions a manger, neither gospel describes a stable/cave. The reference to animals comes from Old Testament prophecy (Isaiah 1:3, LXX Habakkuk 3:2).

The baby Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger: Luke 2:7

The birth of Jesus was announced to nearby shepherds who visited the infant: Luke 2:8-20

Three wise men came from the east to pay homage to the infant Jesus: While the visit of the Magi is described in Matt 2:1-12, there is no mention of any number of Magi, only the gifts.

Magi from the east pay homage to the infant Jesus lying in the manger: The visit appears to occur after the passage of some period of time, and they visit the house in which Matthew seems to believe Joseph and Mary live.

King Herod plots to kill Jesus, so Jesus' parents escape with him to Egypt: Matt 2:13-15

Joseph and Mary return with Jesus to Nazareth by way of Jerusalem: Luke 2:22-52

The Story of the Magi

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet:

'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star's appearance. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage." After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.

Matthew 2

At that time Balak, was king of Moab; and he sent messengers to Balaam, in the land of the Ammonites, to summon him with these words, "A people has come out of Egypt! They have covered up the earth and are settling down opposite me! Now come, curse this people for me, for I know that whoever you bless is blessed and whoever you curse is cursed." So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian, themselves experts in divination, left and went to Balaam, to whom they gave Balak's message.

The LORD put an utterance in Balaam's mouth, and said: Go back to Balak, and speak accordingly. So he went back to Balak, and said:

Balak has led me here, from the mountains of Qedem: (eastern mountains) saying "Come, curse for me Jacob, come, denounce Israel." How can I lay a curse on the one whom God has not cursed? How denounce the one whom the LORD has not denounced?

The oracle of one who hears what God says, and knows what the Most High knows, of one who sees what the Almighty sees, in rapture and with eyes unveiled.

I see him, though not now; I observe him, though not near: A star shall advance from Jacob, and a scepter* shall rise from Israel, That will crush the brows of Moab, and the skull of all the Sethites, Edom will be dispossessed, and no survivor is left in Seir. Israel will act boldly, and Jacob will rule his foes.

Numbers 22, 23, 24 (selected verses)

The Flight to Egypt

When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him." Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophets might be fulfilled, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the magi. Then was fulfilled what had been said through Jeremiah the prophet:

"A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children, and she would not be consoled, since they were no more."

When Herod had died, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." He rose, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go back there. And because he had been warned in a dream, he departed for the region of Galilee. He went and dwelt in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazorean."

Matthew 2

One of the sacred scribes told the king [of Egypt], that a child would be born to the Israelites, who, if he were reared, would bring the Egyptian dominion low, and would raise the Israelites; that he would excel all men in virtue, and obtain a glory that would be remembered through all ages. Which thing was so feared by the king, that he commanded that they should cast every male child, which was born to the Israelites, into the river, and destroy it; that besides this, the Egyptian midwives should watch the labors of the Hebrew women, and observe what is born.

A man whose name was Amram, his wife being then with child, betook himself to prayer to God; Accordingly God had mercy on him, and was moved by his supplication. He stood by him in his sleep, said "Know that I shall provide for you all in common what is for your good, for that child, on whose account the Egyptians have doomed the Israelite children to destruction, shall be this child of yours, and shall be concealed from those who watch to destroy him: and when he is brought up in a surprising way, he shall deliver the Hebrew nation from the distress they are under from the Egyptians. His memory shall be famous while the world lasts; and this not only among the Hebrews, but foreigners also.

Amram's wife bore a son and hid him for three months. But when she could no longer hide him, she took a papyrus basket, daubed it with bitumen and pitch, and putting the child in it, placed it among the reeds on the bank of the Nile. Then Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe at the Nile, while her attendants walked along the bank of the Nile. Noticing the basket among the reeds, she sent her handmaid to fetch it. On opening it, she looked, and there was a baby boy crying! She was moved with pity for him and said, go and summon a Hebrew woman to nurse the child. So the woman took the child and nursed him. When the child grew, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses; for she said, "I drew him out of the water.

Exodus 2, Josephus' Antiquities of the Jews