

THE BIBLE HISTORY TOLD TO OUR CHILDREN

- NEW TESTAMENT -

Chapter 4

The lowly birth of the King of kings

Luke 2 vv 1-7

Matthew 1 vv 18-25

In Nazareth, as I've already told you, lived Joseph and Mary. Joseph, the carpenter, who daily carried out his heavy work and Mary the homely young woman, who was busy in the house. Everything was quite calm and normal and the other inhabitants of Nazareth saw nothing unusual about this couple, for Joseph and Mary have not told of what has happened. Yes, Mary hasn't even told it to her future husband, to Joseph. Yet Joseph has got to know it. How then?

Well, an angel of the Lord has made it known to him in a dream at night. In that unforgettable night the angel told Joseph that Mary his espoused wife would have a son. That Child would be the Lord Jesus and would save His people. He would redeem His people from sin.

Naturally Joseph and Mary spoke to each other about it. Oh, too many questions came into their heads to which they could give no answer. Questions? — What questions?

The Lord Jesus would be born in Bethlehem, surely? That had been foretold by the prophet Micah. But Bethlehem lay right down South and they lived in Nazareth, a town in the North of the land of Canaan. Bethlehem was so far away. They had no money to travel to Bethlehem and after all, what were they to do in Bethlehem? No, the Lord Jesus would be born in Nazareth, because that is where Joseph and Mary lived.

When Joseph and Mary thought about that, then they weren't at all sure. They really didn't

know how that could happen.

And yet the Lord Jesus must be born in Bethlehem, the city of David. That had been foretold and it would also come to pass. How then? How would they ever get to Bethlehem?

Well, Joseph and Mary couldn't answer that question. It seemed impossible. Yet with God all things are possible, and God would make sure that they got to Bethlehem in time.

Nevertheless Joseph and Mary didn't put a hand to it. No, they waited in faith until it was God's time.

That is also an important lesson for us, boys and girls. We start so often to do things ourselves. Oh yes, we do ask the Lord if He will help us in certain matters, but if the Lord does not do so quickly, we don't dare to wait any longer. Why not? Well, we do not trust the Lord. We lack faith, or we fail to use it. Joseph and Mary waited, and they were not ashamed. Those who wait on the Lord are never put to shame.

How the Lord cared for them, and how Joseph and Mary got to Bethlehem, I will now tell you. Listen now, carefully.

Look, along the roads in the land of Canaan many people are walking or riding. The rich ride in a wagon or on camels, the poor walk. Yet all these people are not going in the same direction. Oh no, they hurry along in all directions. There walks a Jewish couple from the South

THE BIBLE HISTORY TOLD TO OUR CHILDREN

- NEW TESTAMENT -



*And it came to pass
in those days...*

towards the North; over there are some travelling from the North towards the South. They are going to all parts. Over the whole land there reigns a sense of urgency and concern for movement. Most of the inhabitants of Canaan are travelling.

Why ever are all those thousands of people journeying and migrating thus back and forth? Whatever has happened?

You know already that Caesar Augustus ruled over the mighty Roman empire. Can you still remember what his real name was? Octavian, wasn't it? But in stupid pride he had changed his name to Augustus, you remember. He wanted to be worshipped like a god.

Well now, one day this mighty Caesar was sitting in his beautiful palace at Rome. He is proud and haughty over all his power and wealth. Suddenly a wonderful idea comes into his head. Yes, yes, that's what he will do! He is going to find out just how many people there are in his extensive empire. He wants to have all his subjects counted.

So he makes a law, that the whole world, that is to say, all the people over whom he rules, must be registered, which means that the people had to be counted (in order to be taxed).

Messengers were sent out in all directions to make known this new law. In the land of Canaan the command of the proud Caesar is also announced. The Jews too must be registered.

But each Jew must go to the place where

he was born, where his family had lived. So, all the people who at some time had moved house, had to go back to their former dwelling place.

Oh, now we can understand why it is that there are so many people on the move. That is why all those thousands of men and women are moving along the roads of the land. They are on the way to their own city or town.

Among all those travellers walk slowly and carefully a man and a woman. They are not rich, that is quite obvious. Oh, many perhaps will have looked on that couple with disdain in their eyes. Who are these two? ...

You have guessed, surely? It is Joseph, and Mary. They too had to travel, because they were both descendants of David — and David, after all, was born in Bethlehem. So they are going to Bethlehem. It is a long and difficult journey and it will take them several days to get to the little town. We do not know whether Mary rode on an ass. We do not read it anywhere in God's word. Perhaps Joseph was too poor to buy an ass.

Tired from the long journey, they arrive at last at their destination. What would be going on in the minds of those two? - Be sure, that they have seen God's hand in it all.

Foolish, proud Augustus, you don't know that you are merely a means in God's hand of bringing two poor people, Joseph and Mary, to Bethlehem. You do not realise that the Lord is making use of you, in order that the promises of God may be fulfilled.

There they are, walking through the streets of Bethlehem. They are happy because now they will be able to rest. At the inn there is still bound to be room for them.

In almost every town or city there was a

THE BIBLE HISTORY TOLD TO OUR CHILDREN

- NEW TESTAMENT -

house, a sort of inn, where strangers could spend the night. In Bethlehem too there was such an inn, and thither Joseph and Mary hastened.

"Is there still room for us to sleep here tonight?" they enquire of the innkeeper, and expect to be shown in. But he has a look to see who it is, and then shakes his head.

"No, I'm sorry, but we are full up. There is no more room at all", comes his answer, and he shuffles off again, for he is busy. Was there really no room at all? ... I believe that if it had been two very rich people, then probably he would have found something. But for that miserable pair he is not going to put himself out. He wouldn't be so foolish.

Sadly, Joseph and Mary exchange glances. What a disappointment for them. And now? They cannot stay in the street. None of the inhabitants of Bethlehem open their doors either. If it had been two distinguished people, dressed in fine clothes, then matters would very likely have gone differently. But for these two, poor as church mice, there is no room.

Oh, children, that is the work of the devil. There is room for everyone, but not for the Lord Jesus. All doors are closed for the Saviour.

Is it not the same too in our hearts? We have time for all sorts of things, but very often there is no time to go to Chapel or Sunday School. Then, all of a sudden, we are much too busy. In our hearts too there is room for everything which the world offers, but no room for the Lord Jesus and His worship.

There, then, stand Joseph and Mary. What must they do now? Where can they go? It is getting dark. In the end they find a shelter in — a cattle shed! Who owned that shed is not written. Some say that it belonged to the shepherds in the field,

but I cannot really tell you whether this was so. Whatever the case was however, God sees to it that they do not have to stay in the street.

And there, in that cattle shed, was the Lord Jesus, the King of kings, the Saviour, the Son of God, born.

No, Mary has no fine, expensive baby clothes to put on that Child, only a few cloths, a few bands, has Mary brought with her. In these was the Lord Jesus wrapped.

The child of a king gets a beautiful cradle with blue drapery perhaps, on which are set pearls and diamonds. But for the Heavenly King there is no cradle. Mary lays her Child in ... a manger, in a fodder trough for cattle.

Oh, boys and girls, what a deep humiliation for the Lord Jesus. No palace, no fine clothing, no glittering cradle. No, a cattle shed is His palace; a few ordinary rags are His baby-clothes; a manger is His cradle. Could it be lower? ... Could it be poorer? ... And, do you know why the Lord Jesus humbled Himself so? That He might redeem His people from misery, that He might bring His elect to eternal glory. The Lord Jesus became poor, that His people might be made rich. He humbled Himself that He might exalt His people.

Look, there sit Joseph and Mary silently by the new-born baby. What will they have been thinking? — Is that now the King of kings? — Is that now the long promised Son of David? Was it all fulfilled in so strange and wonderful a manner?

When a royal baby is born, everybody puts the flags out. Cannons thunder a salute. The newspapers are full of it! Yes, nowadays such an event is made known the world over by means of the radio, the same day. Everything goes to show

THE BIBLE HISTORY TOLD TO OUR CHILDREN

- NEW TESTAMENT -

that the child is welcome.

Here, in Bethlehem's cattle shed, a King has been born too. Not an earthly king, but a Heavenly! The King of kings.

Now nobody puts out the flags, now there is no festive joy in the land. This Child is not welcome. This Child was not looked for. Of course not, people are asleep, and no-one knows what has happened.

In Rome lives Caesar Augustus. He is probably sleeping on a downy bed, with sky-blue drapery over it. In Jerusalem lives the high priest. There too, live many Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees. There live the most prominent Jews. Yet neither do they know what has happened in Bethlehem's cattle shed. And if they had known, they would still not have believed it. What, the Messiah in a cattle shed, lying in a manger? — Impossible! This is what they would have thought and said. Quite definitely. But they do not know.

In those days there lived so many eminent and educated people. But to not one of them was the news brought. To nobody? ...

Luke 2 vv 8-20

Come, let us just go in our thoughts to Bethlehem. We walk through the quiet, forsaken streets. All doors are shut, not a sound is heard! The inhabitants of Bethlehem are asleep, surely? In that village reigns the silence of the night. Soon we are in the open outside the village.

In this countryside Ruth, the Moabitess once walked, gleaning ears in the fields of Boaz. In this same district once, centuries ago, trilled the pure tones of a harp, and resounded the clear youthful voice of David, the simple shepherd boy.

Yet now, it is quiet and still. There is

nothing to see, for it is night...

But — look over there in the distance. There we see a bright light. Quickly we step closer in our thoughts. There sit together silently a few men, evidently round a fire. No, they are not joyful, on the contrary there is a sorrowful look on their faces. Who are they, and what are they doing there, in the depth of night? Why do they stare in front of them so sombrely?

Oh, you know already, don't you? They are some shepherds, watching over their flocks. There was still sufficient pasture in the field and so they had not driven their sheep into the fold, but had remained outside, in the open field. But it got rather chilly in the middle of the night so they have stoked a fire. There they could warm themselves, and at the same time it would keep the wild animals at a distance.

They are sad and sombre because the Jews are coming more and more under the might and oppression of the Romans. Their countrymen are no longer free, no longer independent, the Romans rule over them. Certainly a king does still rule in Jerusalem, but he is a foreigner, an Edomite. His name is Herod. Moreover Herod is a servant of the Roman Caesar.

Oh, when the shepherds think about these things, then they become fearful of heart. Will the promised Messiah never come? ... Jacob had surely said on his deathbed that the sceptre would not depart from Judah? ... And yet now look! ... Had the sceptre not already departed? ... To complete the disaster Caesar had now command that the Jewish people must be taxed.

So, boys and girls, that is why these men are sad; that is why they stare into the fire so sombrely. They looked and longed for the promised Messiah. But it was taking so long. They

THE BIBLE HISTORY TOLD TO OUR CHILDREN

- NEW TESTAMENT -

had become despondent.

All of a sudden they jump with fright, for quite unexpectedly there stands by them a bright figure. The glory and the brightness of heaven shone round about them. They were sore afraid. What is that? ... That does this mean? ...

But the angel says with a friendly voice, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy. The Saviour is born!" It is as though the angel says, "You feared that God's promises would not be fulfilled, didn't you? You doubted whether the King would ever come. But he does come. He IS come! This day He is born, and for you too! He will redeem you too from sin. He will save you also. And these tidings of great joy are not only for you, but to all people. That means, to the whole Church of God. Just go to Bethlehem and you will see it. No, there is nothing unusual for people to see in that Child."

"Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger". Thus speaks the angel.

Oh, those simple shepherds listen open-mouthed, but a heavenly joy drops into their hearts.

Look, the heavenly messenger goes up again on high. But, what is that now? ... The heavens are opened and thousands of angels hover over Ephratah's fields, throughout the atmosphere. Hark! They sing! "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men!"

How marvellous that must have sounded! "Glory to God!" Everything that has come to pass shall work out for God's glory and honour. God shall receive the highest praise.

"Peace on earth!" No, that doesn't mean that there will be no more war, for there will be wars until the Last Day. But it means: Peace, in the

hearts of God's people because the Saviour will pay for their guilt; Jesus shall suffer and die, and thereby God's people will obtain peace and happiness.

Peace with God! And why? ... Because God has good will toward men. Because God will save His elect. They will be acquitted of blame and punishment. No, not everyone is saved. Only those who receive a renewed heart.

How happy are God's people, don't you think? Are you sometimes jealous of them? ... Oh, the devil promises so much, but gives nothing! The world appears so attractive, so happy! Listen to the cheering and shouting noise of the godless, but it's only show. The world tries to laugh misery away. Do you join in too? ... Do you look for everything in this world? ... Oh, then how unspeakably poor you are. For you will never find true happiness or true peace here.

Speechless with astonishment, but with glistening eyes and throbbing hearts the shepherds listen breathlessly.

Then the glorious choir ceases and the angels went away from them into heaven. For a moment they could sing, but the fullness of joy, the eternal hymn of praise, is reserved for heaven. On earth, darkness returns.

For another moment the shepherds stand silently together. Now, they are no longer disheartened and sad; now, a blessed sense of happiness fills their souls.

They said one to another: "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us".

Look, there they go. They are hurrying to Bethlehem. What about their sheep then? ... Oh, they don't think about that. We may be sure,



The shepherds on the way to Bethlehem

children, that the Lord looked after those flocks, that not one little lamb was lost.

There they are reaching the shed, they open the door and step inside. There sits a harmless woman, Mary; there they see a poor man, Joseph; there they look into the manger and see a child, a quite ordinary baby, wrapped merely in swaddling bands.

No, for them it is no quite ordinary child, for them it is the Saviour, their Saviour, who would discharge their debt of guilt. Outwardly there is nothing special about that Child's appearance, but they see, THROUGH FAITH, the Messiah, the King of kings lying there. In adoration they fall upon their knees.

Joseph and Mary see all this in wonder. Then the shepherds tell what has just happened in the fields of Ephrata. Oh, they cannot keep that quiet, their hearts are filled with it. How overjoyed these people were. They have truly celebrated CHRISTMAS.

At last the shepherds go back to the flocks they had left. But they do more. They glorify and praise God for all that they had heard and seen. Certainly they have also told it to others, but we read nowhere that others went to look in the manger.

So, you see children, that is the story of the birth of the Lord Jesus. Each year we celebrate Christmas. Then we remember that happy event.

Nowadays, people celebrate Christmas so snugly, so merrily! All "pretty lights". Everywhere Christmas trees are brought indoors. They are decorated with gold or silver balls. Long festoons are wound around the branches. Then there are often a lot of candles fixed to it, and in the evening these are lighted. There are also electric "fairy lamps". How lovely! How pretty! How cosy! ...

In my thoughts I see some of you shaking your heads and saying: "But that's not right surely! That is not the meaning of Christmas?"

THE BIBLE HISTORY TOLD TO OUR CHILDREN

- NEW TESTAMENT -

Oh, children, the whole "Christmas Tree Movement" is an invention of SATAN. We must just look at the "pretty lights", and well, yes sing one or two carols too. But to celebrate Christmas in truth, no, the devil will have none of that. He fights against that.

They put these Christmas trees everywhere. On railway stations, in cafés, in places where dance music blares out, yes, I have even seen them standing at the entrances of cinemas. Oh, the devil doesn't care how many Christmas trees are bought, the more the better. If people don't think too much about the true meaning of Christmas, as long as they forget that.

What do you think? Could there have been a Christmas tree in Bethlehem's cattle shed? Would the shepherds or would Mary have lighted lamps or candles? No, of course not. ... They did not NEED a Christmas tree. Yet in that shed they did indeed celebrate Christmas in truth. There it was Christmas in their HEARTS. But there the devil did not have his own way. He fled from there.

Nowadays many people celebrate Christmas in their HEAD, nothing more. And the devil also joins in such celebrations.

If we just think for a moment why the Lord Jesus came to this earth; if we think about the deep humiliation of the Son of God, who left heaven to come down to this world, cursed by our

sins; if we think that He came to suffer, and to die that God-cursed death on the cross, that He might save His people from sin, then we shall not have the heart to bring a Christmas tree in our home, but then we shall bend our knees with weeping, and humbly beseech Him to give us also a new heart, and to save us too from eternal misery. If we for a moment consider the thought of what our sins have cost the Lord Jesus, then we need no Christmas tree.

Perhaps you are thinking: "But Christmas is surely a time of good cheer. At Christmas surely, we remember that the Son of God, the Son of righteousness, came down into this sin-cursed world?"

Certainly, you are quite right. Christmas IS a festival of joy, of happiness, of LIGHT. All who truly celebrate Christmas will bow down in deep humility before that Babe in Bethlehem's stall. He came, for them, to quench God's wrath, to close the gates of hell, to conquer death and bruise the head of Satan with the price of His own blood. Yet such people, I repeat, have no need of a Christmas tree.

By means of the "Christmas-tree Movement" the true meaning of the Saviour's coming in the flesh is pushed in the background.

May the Lord grant that it may one day be truly Christmas-time for you.