

Two e-Books in One!

The Nativity Story



Nativity Activities

By Teri Ann Berg Olsen

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The Nativity Story



Nativity Activities

By Teri Ann Berg Olsen

The Nativity Story: with Nativity Activities

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by Teri Ann Berg Olsen

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The Mystical Nativity, a painting by Sandro Botticelli, c. 1501
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This Book is Dedicated to:

Jesus Christ

* * *

*“For God so loved the world, that he
gave his only begotten Son, that
whosoever believeth in Him should
not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

~John 3:16~

*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son
is given: and the government shall be upon
his shoulder: and his name shall be called
Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God,
Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.*

~Isaiah 9:6~

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Introduction

This e-book is really two books in one. It contains an original 10-page rendition of The Nativity Story, as well as a collection of Nativity Activities. The Nativity Story can stand alone as a family read-aloud or holiday devotional study, separate from the Nativity Activities section. I've also included an abridged version of the story that you can print out to enclose in Christmas cards or to use as handouts.

You may want to print this e-book in its entirety and punch holes in the pages for placing in a three-ring binder, or you can take it to a copy shop and get a plastic comb binding. I have provided two full-color pages to use as front and back covers. If desired, you can print these on heavy card stock. The rest of the pages can be printed on both sides of the paper so that it will look just like a regular book.

The individual Nativity Activity pages can also be stored on your computer and printed out as needed. I have set up the pages so that they are easy to do this way, since everything pertaining to a particular topic is either all on one page or on a double-sided page. These fun and educational activities will happily occupy children during Advent season, and some of the pages are suitable for using as classroom handouts.

There are no suggested age levels listed, since children's abilities and interests differ, and many of the projects can be done as a family. Parents may want to preview the web resources that I have listed, particularly the art sites, to make sure they are appropriate for their children. Even though I'm recommending them, I realize that people have different tastes.

I sincerely hope that this e-book will make your study of the Nativity memorable in a special way. It is my wish that you and your loved ones will be inspired to experience Christmas as it should be, with Christ at the center of all your festivities. Simplify the holiday by eliminating excess activities and concentrating on the main focus. Jesus always has been and always will be the reason for the season.

Teri

The Nativity Story



An original rendition of the Nativity written by
Teri Ann Berg Olsen

Foreword

(Or, How This Story Came to Be)

I originally created my version of the Nativity story in December of 2000. It was published in "Not Just For Kids," a weekly column that I write for my hometown newspaper, *The Desert Advocate*. The goal that I had in mind was leading readers to refocus on the "Christ" in Christmas, while bringing the Nativity story to life in my own way. For example, the vivid imagery of trekking across the desert (and trying to find a place to stay!) comes from personal experience.

As a homeschool parent, I like to fill my articles with educational content. In the Bible, the events surrounding the birth of Jesus are told with remarkable simplicity. However, this leaves out many details which I attempted to include such as: What type of road did Mary and Joseph travel on? What did they see and talk about along the way? What sort of structure was the stable? Thus, my account of the Nativity is not only based on quotes from Scripture, but also considering people's thoughts and feelings while researching the geography, architecture, and lifestyle of the time.

To make the events flow smoothly, I decided to condense the period of time involved without departing from the basic story line. Also, in certain cases when historians do not agree, I had to make my own choices as to what happened. The addition of other descriptive embellishments are solely for the purpose of providing a clearer picture and do not change anything. I sincerely hope that this story will be a blessing to you at Christmas and always. Enjoy!

In Christ,
Teri

The Nativity Story

Retold by Teri Ann Berg Olsen

More than two thousand years ago, a miraculous event that changed the course of history occurred in an area known as the Holy Land, a desert region located between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, in the Middle Eastern nation of Israel.

The largest settlement in this land was the city of Jerusalem, an important religious center and busy trading place. Bethlehem was a tiny hilltop town in Judea, set on a ridge in the mountains just six miles south of Jerusalem. About 65 miles north of Jerusalem, the small village of Nazareth was nestled in a sheltered valley among the hills of Galilee, 1200 feet above sea level.

Homes of the period were typically square structures made of mud bricks on stone foundations, usually having two floors and flat roofs. A family would often live upstairs and keep their animals in the lower level. At the same time, the prosperous city of Jerusalem had splendid villas, a magnificent palace, a newly-built temple, an open-air theater, and a stadium for chariot races.

Most inhabitants of the Holy Land were Jewish, but they were ruled by the Roman Empire. The Romans treated the Jews harshly.

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Herod the Great, a cruel tyrant and a friend of Rome, was the local king of Judea. His subjects were God-fearing, hardworking shepherds, farmers, and craftsmen. These Jewish people never gave up hope that someday God would send a Savior to deliver them from their oppressors, as the prophets had foretold.

In the village of Nazareth there lived a peasant girl named Mary, who was faithful, kind-hearted, and virtuous. She was pledged to marry a young carpenter named Joseph, who was strong, level-headed, and righteous. Both Mary and Joseph were descendants of David, the second king of Israel. Even so, they were common people and were used to making do with what little they had.

One day the angel Gabriel appeared before Mary. She was startled and trembled with fear, not knowing what to expect. "Do not be afraid, Mary," he said. "Blessed are you among women. God has chosen you to be the mother of His son. The child will be called Jesus. He will reign over the Kingdom of David and his rule will never end."

Mary knelt in front of Gabriel with her head bowed and responded simply, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything that you have told me come true." Then when she looked up, the angel had gone.

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Another angel visited Joseph in a dream and said, “Mary is to be the mother of God’s son. You should go ahead with your wedding ceremony, because God has chosen you to be the guardian of His child.” Joseph did what the angel commanded.

Soon after Joseph and Mary were married, the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, decreed that a census would be taken throughout the Roman Empire. Caesar demanded that everyone immediately return to the city of their origin to be counted and to register as taxpayers. Failure to obey would result in strict punishment.

For Mary and Joseph, this meant that they must go on a long journey when Mary was with child, and close to the time of birth. They would have to travel all the way to Bethlehem, a distance of over seventy miles, and they could not delay the trip until after the baby was born.

Joseph harnessed their donkey and filled its saddlebags with food, water, clothing, blankets and other supplies. Joseph helped Mary climb up onto the donkey’s back. He led the donkey away from their home, down the streets of Nazareth, and into the wilderness.

Mary and Joseph traveled by day under the bright glare of the sun. They plodded down dusty trails to the sandy river valley, and trudged up steep winding paths over rocky hills. On the way, they

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saw mountain gazelles and desert foxes. The couple camped out at night under a clear starry sky. The temperature dropped rapidly after sunset. Roaming jackals and wolves howled in the darkness.

The road stretched on and on. Mary and Joseph were weary, hungry, and thirsty. They comforted each other and had faith that God would provide for them and keep them safe. Eventually, they came to an oasis of lush greenery, date palm groves, and clear spring water at which they were able to refresh themselves.

After about a week of travel, Mary and Joseph encountered more people along the route. This meant that they were close to the city. Soon they could see Jerusalem up ahead and they knew their destination was just beyond it. The couple hurried through the noisy, crowded city in order to reach Bethlehem before dark. Mary sensed that the time of birth was approaching and she was anxious to find proper shelter.

By the time Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, the sun was setting and the town was overflowing with visitors. The village inn was already filled to capacity. They walked down the narrow streets, looking for a place to stay, but no accommodations were available at any house or lodging. Then they came to the edge of town, where a split level structure was built on a hillside. They climbed up the stairs to the main floor, knowing that this was their last hope.

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When the owner answered the door and said that he had no spare room, Joseph pleaded, “My wife is about to have a baby. Is there any place where we can stay, to get her out of the cold night air and provide her with some comfort?”

The kind gentleman offered to let them spend the night in the lower part of the house, which was used as a stable. Excavated into the side of the hill, it consisted of rough limestone walls on three sides, posts and beams supporting the upstairs floor, and a wooden overhang across the front. “At least you will have a roof over your heads,” he said, “and my animals will keep you warm.”

Finally, Joseph and Mary had a place to rest. Joseph cleaned up the cave-like room as well as he could and gathered some straw to make beds on which to sleep. There, during the night, Mary’s son was born. They named him Jesus, as the angel had told them to do. Mary wrapped him snugly in strips of linen cloth, according to custom. Joseph filled an empty feeding trough with soft straw to use as a crib. There was no place else for the baby to sleep.

That night some shepherds were sitting around their campfire in a field outside the village, keeping watch over their sheep. Suddenly, an angel appeared among them and the glory of the Lord shone around them. The shepherds were terrified, speechless, and hid their eyes, but the angel said:

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“Fear not! I bring tidings of great joy. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign: you will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.”

Then the angel was joined by a multitude of others, whose heavenly voices rang out like bells, singing: “Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth, and good will toward men.”

The shepherds were guided to the hillside stable by the light of a star hovering overhead. Peeking inside, they were somehow not surprised to see the newborn baby Jesus, who lay in a manger just as the angel of the Lord had said. The soft coos of the tiny infant mingled with the bleating of sheep and the mooing of cows. The shepherds understood that this simple setting was more marvelous than any palace, and their hearts were filled with gladness.

Praising God as they went, the shepherds ran through the village and told everyone they met about what they had seen and heard. The townspeople were amazed by the news of this baby who was the son of God. As the word spread, people came from miles around to see the Christ child and bring him gifts. Mary gracefully accepted every present, no matter how small, while she quietly pondered to herself about everything that had happened.

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Meanwhile, in different faraway lands to the east, three wealthy wise men were each gazing at a star in the sky that none of them had ever seen before. It glowed much more brightly than the other stars. These men had no doubt that this signaled the birth of a great king. They had read the book of Daniel, who 600 years earlier predicted the year in which the king and savior of Israel would arrive.

The three wise men set out independently to follow this star, believing that it would lead the way to the newborn king. They each carried with them a valuable treasure: gold, a precious metal; frankincense, a perfumed resin; and myrrh, a fragrant gum. After traveling for a while, the three men met in the desert. Realizing that they were all on the same pilgrimage, the men decided to continue on their journey together.

When the three wise men arrived in Jerusalem, they believed that the birthplace they were seeking must be nearby. As they walked through the bustling streets of the city, the wise men asked passersby for news of the child. "Where is the newborn king of the Jews?" they inquired. "We have seen his star and have come to worship him."

One of King Herod's soldiers overheard the three strangers. He hurried to the palace to notify King Herod. "They ride fine camels and wear rich robes," he informed the king, "and they speak of an ancient prophecy, that a child will be king of the Jews."

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Herod bellowed in anger, "I am the rightful king! There can be no other!" He had heard rumors, but had not taken them seriously. Now he was getting concerned. King Herod gathered together all of the Jewish priests and scribes. They consulted their books (including Micah 5:2) and confirmed that the prophecy was true. Herod, deeply disturbed by this, secretly plotted to destroy the baby.

King Herod sent a messenger to summon the three wise men to his palace. When they stood before his throne, Herod pretended that he wished to worship the new child-king. "As soon as you locate this newborn king," Herod said, "come back and tell me where I may find him." Ironically, King Herod was unaware that the stable where Jesus slept was in plain view of his own fabulous fortress.

That evening, the star once again guided the three wise men. As they neared Bethlehem, they saw that the light was just ahead. The closer they came to the stable, the brighter the light shone over the place where the Christ child was. The wealthy men, in their fancy silk robes adorned with jewelry, stepped inside the lowly stable.

Upon seeing the baby Jesus in Mary's arms, the wise men fell to their knees and worshipped him. All of the animals in the stable had bowed their heads to honor the newborn king as well. Then the three men brought out their treasures of gold, frankincense and myrrh, and placed them on the dirt floor before the baby.

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Later that night, in their campsite outside of Bethlehem, an angel appeared to the three wise men. “Do not report back to King Herod,” said the angel. “When Herod finds out where the child-king is, he plans to harm him, not worship him.”

The following morning, the wise men were eager to bring the wonderful news of Christ’s birth back to their own countries. They departed and remembered to take a different route home, so as to avoid Jerusalem where King Herod was waiting for them.

The night after the wise men had gone, an angel came to Joseph as he slept and said, “Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother. Herod’s soldiers are searching for the baby to kill him.”

The family slipped away under cover of darkness, and by daylight they were far from Bethlehem. Joseph and Mary had to take the newborn baby on a trek across the desert for almost one hundred miles. Upon arriving safely in Egypt, they remained there until King Herod died and they were able to return home to Nazareth.

Thus, the ancient prophecy was fulfilled. A Savior had indeed been delivered unto the people. God’s gift of Jesus came for everyone – young and old, poor and wealthy, people of all races and nations. This is the reason for the Christmas season, that joyous time of year when we celebrate the birth of a blessed baby in a humble stable long ago.

Afterword

Isn't it amazing how a baby born over 2,000 years ago changed the whole course of human history? The coming of Jesus brought the good news of God's love to the world – a beacon of hope in the midst of despair, a message of peace in a time of turmoil, and a bright light in the middle of darkness. Wise men, women, and children continue to seek Him.

Nevertheless, at the time of Christ's nativity, everyone's attention was focused on Rome and the decrees of Caesar. No one was interested in a young couple that had gone on a long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be counted for the census. Likewise, the birth of a Jewish baby was of little significance compared to imperial events.

Yet without realizing it, the mightiest of men were only errand boys for fulfilling the ancient prophets' predictions. While the Romans were busy building a great empire, God in human form arrived silently, on straw, in a stable, under a star. These were humble conditions indeed for the King of all kings! God came down to earth – and that is the miracle of Christmas.

It is important to remember that the Nativity story is not a myth or fairy tale – it really happened! The miracle of Christ's birth does not contradict science. God created time, matter, energy, and space. He transcends and is outside of all these. Scoffers and skeptics are biased against this truth. Their own desire to live as they please without the knowledge of God disrupts their reasoning and closes their hearts to the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus arrived, the world hardly noticed – how about you? In your quest to find happiness, are you overlooking the One who can bring true joy and peace? He came that you may have life, and live it to the fullest. To know Christ is to receive all that Christmas was meant to be. He is the greatest gift of all!

Biblical References

The following scriptures foretell or describe the Nativity. The scriptural quotations in this book are from *The Holy Bible, Authorized King James Version*, first published in the year 1611. The King James Bible is known for its poetic beauty and structure. It is the most enduring, often-quoted, and reliably accurate word-for-word translation.

In colonial America, children were taught to read by means of the King James Bible. While its language may sound archaic today, a familiarity with this version of the Bible prepares modern students for reading Shakespeare. (The King James Bible was published in the same year that William Shakespeare began work on *The Tempest*.)

Old Testament

Isaiah 7:14 - Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Isaiah 9:6 - For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 60:6 - The dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the Lord.

Daniel 9:25 - Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks.

Micah 5:2 - But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

New Testament

Luke 1

1:26 And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

1:27 To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

1:28 And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

1:29 And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

1:30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

1:31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus.

1:32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

1:33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

1:34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

1:35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

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1:36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

1:37 For with God nothing shall be impossible.

1:38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

Matthew 1

1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

1:19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

1:20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

1:21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.

1:22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

1:23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which interpreted is, God with us.

1:24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

1:25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus.

Luke 2

2:1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.

2:2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

2:3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

2:4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

2:5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

2:6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

2:7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

2:8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

2:9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

2:10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

2:11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

2:12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in

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swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

2:13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

2:14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men.

2:15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds 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.

2:16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

2:17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

2:18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

2:19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

2:20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Matthew 2

2:1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

2:2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

2:3 When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

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2:4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

2:5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

2:6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

2:7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

2:8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

2:9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

2:10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

2:11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

2:12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

2:13 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

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2:14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

2:15 And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

2:16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.

2:17 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,

2:18 In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

2:19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

2:20 Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.

2:21 And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

2:22 But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:

2:23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

Questions for Study and Discussion

1. How do Old Testament prophecies support Jesus' birth as that of the Messiah?
2. What part did dreams play in the birth and infancy of Jesus?
3. Why did God send Baby Jesus to us?
4. Explain the meanings of Jesus' name.
5. Why do you think God chose Mary to be the mother of His Son?
6. How is the virgin birth important to our understanding of who Jesus was and is?
7. What can we learn about obedience from Mary and Joseph?
8. Have you had any experiences where God has taught you to be a willing servant?
9. When God's plan for you involves challenges, difficulties, or inconveniences, how do you react to them?
10. How might being forced out of our comfort zone be good for us?
11. What specific events indicate that Jesus is the Messiah?
12. Why was it important to have poor shepherds and rich wise men both playing a major role in the Nativity story?
13. What was the significance of Jesus being born in a lowly stable rather than inside a comfortable castle?
14. How would you feel about having to lay your baby in a feed trough because there was no other place?
15. If you could travel back to the time of Christ's birth, where would you go and what would you do?
16. If you were to witness a miracle today, would you quietly ponder what happened or would you be eager to tell everyone?
17. Compare traditional popular stories about the Nativity to the actual Gospel accounts. How are they the same? How do they differ?
18. Can you feel God working in your life or are you mostly unaware? How might you become more conscious of His presence?
19. What was the most amazing or joyous thing that has happened in your life? How do you look back on it?
20. Every one of us has a gift to bring. What special gifts has God given you to share with others?

The Nativity Story

By Teri Ann Berg Olsen

www.KnowledgeHouse.info

More than two thousand years ago, a miraculous event that changed the course of history occurred in an area known as the Holy Land, a desert region located between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, in the Middle Eastern nation of Israel.

While most people in the Holy Land were Jewish, they were ruled by the Roman Empire. The Romans treated the Jews harshly. Herod the Great, the local king of Judea, was a cruel tyrant. The Jewish people never gave up hope that someday God would send a Savior to deliver them from their oppressors, as the prophets had foretold.

In the village of Nazareth there lived a peasant girl named Mary, who was pledged to marry a young carpenter named Joseph. Both Mary and Joseph were descendants of David, the second king of Israel. Even so, they were common people and were used to making do with what little they had.

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Another angel visited Joseph in a dream and said, "Mary is to be the mother of God's son. You should go ahead with your wedding ceremony, for you will be the guardian of His child." Joseph did what the angel commanded.

Soon after Joseph and Mary were married, the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus decreed that everyone must immediately return to the city of their origin to register as taxpayers. For Mary and Joseph, this meant that they would have to travel all the way to Bethlehem, a distance of over 70 miles. They could not delay the trip until after the baby was born.

Mary rode on a donkey as Joseph guided them down dusty trails to the sandy river valley, and trudged up steep winding paths over rocky hills. On the way, they saw mountain gazelles and desert foxes. The couple traveled by day under the bright glare of the sun, and camped out at night under a clear starry sky. The temperature dropped rapidly after sunset. Roaming jackals and wolves howled in the darkness.

After about a week of travel, Mary and Joseph encountered more people along the route. This meant that they were close to the city. Soon they could see Jerusalem up ahead and they knew their destination was just beyond it. The couple hurried through the noisy, crowded city in order to reach Bethlehem before dark.

By the time Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, the sun was setting and the village inn was already filled to capacity. They walked down the narrow streets looking for a place to stay, but could not find any. Finally they came to the edge of town, where a split level structure was built on a hillside. They climbed up the stairs to the main floor, knowing that this was their last hope.

The kind gentleman who answered the door offered to let them spend the night in the lower part of his house, which was used as a stable. Excavated into the side of the hill, it consisted of rough limestone walls on three sides, posts and beams supporting the upstairs floor, and a wooden overhang across the front.

Joseph cleaned up the cave-like room and gathered some straw to make beds on which to sleep. At least they had a roof over their heads. There, during the night, Jesus was born. Mary wrapped him snugly in strips of linen cloth, according to custom. Joseph filled an empty feeding trough with soft straw to use as a crib.

That night some shepherds were sitting around their campfire in a field outside the village. Suddenly, an angel appeared among them and said: "Fear not! I bring tidings of great joy. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord." Then the angel was joined by a multitude of heavenly voices, singing: "Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth, good will toward men."

The shepherds ran through the village, praising God and telling everyone what they had seen and heard. The townspeople were amazed by the news of this baby who was the son of God. As the word spread, people came from miles around to see the Christ child and bring him gifts. Mary gracefully accepted every present, no matter how small, while she quietly pondered to herself about everything that had happened.

Meanwhile, in different faraway lands to the east, three wealthy wise men were each gazing at a star in the sky that glowed much more brightly than any others. These men had no doubt that this signaled the birth of a great king. They had read the book of Daniel who 600 years earlier predicted the year in which the savior of Israel would arrive.

The three wise men set out independently to follow the star, believing that it would lead the way to this newborn king and savior. They each carried with them a valuable treasure: gold, a precious metal; frankincense, a perfumed resin; and myrrh, a fragrant gum. After traveling for a while, the three men met in the desert. Realizing that they were all on the same pilgrimage, the men decided to continue on their journey together.

As the three wise men neared Bethlehem, they saw that the star light shone just ahead of them. The closer they came to the stable, the brighter it appeared overhead. The wealthy men, dressed in their fancy silk robes adorned with jewelry, stepped inside the lowly stable. Upon seeing the baby Jesus, the wise men fell to their knees and worshipped him. Then they brought out their treasures and placed them on the dirt floor before the baby.

Thus, the ancient prophecy was fulfilled. A Savior had indeed been delivered unto the people. The coming of Jesus brought the good news of God's love to the world. God's gift of Jesus came for everyone – young and old, poor and wealthy, people of all races and nations. This is the reason for the Christmas season, that joyous time of year when we celebrate the birth of a blessed baby in a humble stable long ago.

This is a condensed version of *The Nativity Story* ©2000 by Teri Ann Berg Olsen.
Permission is hereby granted to make copies for Christmas cards and handouts.
Download the complete story and activity guide at: www.knowledgehouse.info/nativity.html
Teri is the author of *Learning for Life: Educational Words of Wisdom*, a book of quotations.
For more information, visit her website at www.KnowledgeHouse.info.

Nativity Activities

By Teri Ann Berg Olsen

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Nativity Activities

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I hope and pray that these activities will make your study of the Nativity memorable and meaningful in a special way!

Nativity Quiz

1. Mary and Joseph lived in which village?
 Bethlehem Nazareth Jerusalem
2. Both Joseph and Mary were descendents of what king?
 David Balthazar Herod
3. Which place had no room?
 Castle Stable Inn
4. In what town was Baby Jesus born?
 Nazareth Bethlehem Jerusalem
5. What was Baby Jesus laid in?
 Manger Cradle Basket
6. The shepherds had a flock of which animals?
 Cattle Sheep Goats
7. How did the Wise Men find Baby Jesus?
 They followed a map. They asked the shepherds. They followed a star.
8. Who brought presents for the Baby Jesus?
 Shepherds Soldiers Wise Men
9. What gifts were presented to Baby Jesus?
 Handmade toys Gold, frankincense, and myrrh A pair of turtledoves
10. Joseph and Mary fled with Baby Jesus to what country?
 Egypt Rome Europe

Nativity Vocabulary

Census - In ancient Rome, a registered declaration by the citizens of their name, residence, and property (i.e., children, servants, land, animals, etc.)

Christ - The Anointed One; synonymous with the Hebrew Messiah.

Crèche - A three-dimensional Nativity display with a stable and figures.

Command - To lead, direct, or order, implying supreme authority and requiring obedience.

Custom - A long established practice or established manner.

Demand - A strong request; to ask for boldly or urgently.

Descendant - Any person who is an offspring, however remote, of a certain ancestor, family, group, etc.; in the line of generation.

Epiphany - A sudden revelation, illuminating discovery, or realization.

Lord - One having great power and authority; ruler; master; God; Jesus.

Magi - Wise men from the East who brought gifts to the infant Jesus.

Manger - A trough or box in which food is laid for cattle or horses.

Messiah - The Savior of the world; the promised deliverer of the Jews.

Multitude - A great number; many.

Nativity - The time, place and manner of birth; esp. the birth of Jesus.

Oppressor - One that imposes unreasonable burdens and/or unjust laws.

Ponder - To weigh in the mind; to consider and compare the circumstances or consequences of an event.

Prophecy - A foretelling; prediction; a declaration of something to come.

Righteous - Holy in heart; having a sense of justice and morality.

Savior - One who saves or preserves, specifically in relation to everlasting salvation; literally "life-giver"; Jesus Christ.

Swaddle - To wrap a newborn baby in strips of cloth to restrict movement.

Temple - A house of worship; a building erected as a place of public religious practice.

Tidings - News; information.

Tradition - Cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs, and institutions, as handed down by word of mouth through the generations.

Tyrant - An oppressive ruler who exercises the harsh use of power.

Virtuous - Morally good, chaste, and abstaining from vice.

Worship - To adore; to honor; to reverence with great respect.

Nativity Word Search

J A L I I O A D A O Y E T O O R E L B M I A A T G
B N I E E B E T H L E H E M E E T Y G Y G N I E M
E G N O G O U Y O W A M T A L G R C M R O Y I Y L
N E N A T O R H R L N A N H E S E G L R D E H A L
M L A D P A U Y I L L R T S J O S E P H Y D U E L
S R F M N A T I V I T Y O L N R I O O G R G L N N
M R U O E T M N B D A U A R R M T A E Y H B M E J
H B H A L H L O L F R S A L L A F L L A A B G P E
D G U R A A O N R O M B O L G R R A B N E A N L S
W G N B R O A S A I R L I I T Y A L O L G A R O U
S L E A U P G H E R O D L S E T N M Y G N U O M S
T N G E L A U D E A R L E T L D K L U L U O O N O
A A L O L L R N M D A J R A T S I L N A O U E A I
R L W I E I E D I D A A I B A T N O U I N N Y A O
G U L Y E M S D G M E I O L N L C E L T L L D L B
I I A W L A T M E H R A M E U L E I A R T L E A L
U N E N I R A L S R M H R G Y E N I E N Y E M A O
Y E L U R Y B I W Y E A A H O I S Y A L R M Y G E
A R N S R A L H A A R R A E E E E T U G R I Y E Y
A R A A B H E U U W Y T L I E L M F M B R F I M T
A U R A W G O L D R B S T R P O R G E W W O O P D
B O L M L L W O M O R R A J E R U S A L E M L B T
S H E P H E R D N E E Y E M L O A L T H L L W A L
E R L L G R E E Y L E L I O U H D E W G R U G R S
M A L R G A L T T I A E C L M B A C E A N M L A L

JESUS
STAR
ANGEL
GOLD
MARY

JOSEPH
INN
STABLE
MYRRH
HEROD

FRANKINCENSE
BETHLEHEM
JERUSALEM
SHEPHERD
NATIVITY

Nativity Word Scramble

NIN

OHYL

INGK

TARS

DLOG

YMRA

SEUSJ

NALEG

SLETAB

ABSELT

PHJEOS

RMYRH

DRHOE

NTVIITAY

HERSPEHD

AERNZATH

STRAMSHIC

JUMERSALE

EBLHTEMEH

INESANKENCFR

Nativity Traditions

One of the traditional ways in which Christians around the world celebrate Christmas is by commemorating or re-creating the Nativity. For example, the Eastern Orthodox Church practices the Nativity Fast in anticipation of Jesus' birth, while much of the Western Church celebrates Advent.

Advent is the four-week period preceding Christmas Day, beginning on the Sunday nearest November 30. The word advent, from Latin, means "coming." It is a time of anticipating the Nativity and the coming of Christ. Advent calendars are used to count down the days until Christmas.

In many churches, children perform plays portraying the events of the Nativity. People sing Christmas carols telling about the birth of Jesus. Some homes, yards, and public places have a Nativity scene or crèche on display, with small figurines or statuettes to represent key characters in the event. Living Nativity scenes use human actors and real live animals.

Bethlehem, the town where Jesus was born, has a Christmas Eve parade that leads to the Church of the Nativity. The procession solemnly enters the church and places an effigy of the Holy Child inside. A silver star in a grotto marks the birth site of Jesus.

On December 23 in Italy, children dressed as shepherds – and even real shepherds in some places – go from house to house playing songs on shepherds' pipes and giving recitations while collecting money for charity.

Nativity scenes in Brazil typically feature life-size figures of Baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, shepherds, sheep, cows and camels in a tropical garden setting. They often include modern items such as electric trains, to show the Christ child all the new things that have happened since He was born.

In Ireland on Christmas Eve, a tall candle is placed on the windowsill and lit. The candle burns all night to light the way for anyone who may be out traveling like Mary and Joseph were long ago.

Nativity Activities ... Page 7

An important Christmas tradition in Mexico is “Las Posadas.” This is a re-enactment of Joseph and Mary searching for a place to stay. Participants walk from house to house and are turned away until they come to a home that will let them in. At this point they kneel around a nativity scene. (The figure of the Baby Jesus is not put into the manger until December 24, and the Three Kings are added on January 5.) A prayer is spoken and carols are sung. Then the celebration begins, complete with a piñata. The nine posadas symbolize Mary’s nine months of pregnancy. Each family in the neighborhood schedules a night to host the Posada at their home between December 16 - 24. On Christmas Eve, everyone goes to midnight Mass.

While the Western Christian Church celebrates Christmas on December 25, the Eastern Orthodox Church historically has set aside January 6 as the celebration of the Nativity. This holiday, Epiphany, commemorates the revealing of Christ to the Gentiles, in the visit of the three Magi from the East who wisely recognized Jesus as the King of all people. In many countries, gifts are given on this day rather than on Christmas since it is the day the Wise Men brought gifts for baby Jesus. Epiphany is sometimes called “Little Christmas.”

The Feast of Epiphany is also known as “The Adoration of the Magi.” In German-speaking countries, the initials of the Three Magi (Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar) are inscribed in chalk over doorways on the eve of the feast. In the West, Epiphany became known as Twelfth Day and the night before is Twelfth Night, also a time of celebration. Traditionally, the “Twelve Days of Christmas” begin on Christmas Day and end on January 6. Epiphany marks the end of the Christmas season, and in many homes the Christmas tree is taken down on that day.

Write a Report – Tell about your family’s Nativity traditions. For example, do you open your gifts on Christmas Eve, Christmas morning, or Little Christmas? Is there a crèche set up somewhere inside your house or out in the front yard? What is it made of and what does it look like? Does your family incorporate customs from other countries into your holiday celebrations? Where do these traditions come from? Has your family started any of their own traditions?

Nativity Projects & Crafts

Interactive Nativity Story - Read the story of Jesus' birth while setting up your family's Nativity scene. Hand each person a Nativity figure to start with. As you read the story, whenever a character is mentioned for the first time, the person who is holding that figure places it in the scene. By the end of the story, the whole nativity scene will be set up.

Nativity Memory Game - Gather the children around your Nativity set. Tell them to close their eyes. Remove one of the pieces and ask the children if they can figure out which piece is missing. Once the missing piece is discovered, talk about its significance in the Nativity. For example, if you remove a shepherd, ask the children what the shepherds did that we remember at Christmas time. This game will reinforce the message of the Nativity story.

Nativity Play - Put together some simple costumes and props. Choose who will play the role of which character. Act out the Nativity story, either by having a narrator read it while the players perform their parts, or by following a script and having each player recite his or her lines.

Living Nativity - Go to see a Living Nativity, Walk-Thru Bethlehem, Christmas pageant or Nativity play featuring real people and live animals.

Nativity Puppets - Draw and color Nativity characters on white card stock or poster board. Cut around the figures. Glue or tape each one onto the end of a Popsicle stick or craft stick. Put on a Nativity puppet show.

Paper Nativity Scene - All you need are scissors, glue, paper and cutouts:
www.scrapbookscrapbook.com/free-printable-christmas-nativity.html

Sculpey® Nativity Scene - Create your own nativity set using polymer clay. Complete project instructions can be found on the following pages:
http://www.sculpey.com/Projects/projects_nativity.htm
http://www.sculpey.com/Projects/projects_NativitySet.htm

Nativity Story Book - Children can make their own picture book depicting the events of the Nativity.

Starry Nativity Scene - You will need to begin this project several weeks before Christmas. On a piece of dark blue or black construction paper, glue four craft sticks in the shape of a house. Cut out pictures of the Holy Family from old Christmas cards, and paste them in the scene. Get some shiny foil star stickers. Tell your child that for every good deed performed, he or she gets to place a star on the Nativity picture. By Christmas, they will have created a beautiful starry sky to welcome Baby Jesus!

Jesus Tree - Decorate a Christmas tree with Nativity-themed ornaments, candy canes, and stars. (See: www.jesustreedecorations.com.) Underneath the tree, place a small wooden cradle or box. Fill it with straw, hay, or Easter grass if you have any. Have the kids wrap a doll with swaddling cloths made from strips of sheet. Lay the doll in the box. Set wrapped gifts around the tree as presents for "Baby Jesus."

Doll Manger Scene - Hang a shiny star ornament or decorative star lamp in a quiet corner of your living room or family room. Under the star, set a doll-sized cradle or bassinet. Wrap a doll in swaddling cloths and place it in the cradle. Stuffed animals and/or a rocking horse will complete this manger scene. Children will love taking care of "Baby Jesus."

Nativity Shape Scene - On a sheet of blue construction paper, paste a large yellow triangle for the stable. Make a manger out of a brown rectangle. Make Baby Jesus out of a pink circle and a pink oval. Stick a tiny red heart on his chest. Use a square piece of purple paper for a blanket, and glue one side only so that you can lift it up to see the baby's body. Cut out an orange star shape, sprinkle it with glitter if desired, and paste it in the sky. On one side of the stable, paste an angel made out of a white triangle body, a white circle head, and triangle wings. On the other side, add a big green triangle tree. With a hole punch, make little round dots of different colors from leftover pieces of paper. Use a glue stick to paste these dots on the tree as ornaments. When finished, name the colors and count how many examples of each shape you can find in the picture.

Clay-Dough Nativity Figures - Mix 2 cups flour, 1 cup salt, and 1 cup water to make a stiff dough. On a floured surface, mold the dough into the shapes of Nativity characters (Mary, Joseph, Baby, Angel, Shepherds, Wise Men, animals, etc.) Put them on a cookie sheet and place in oven. Set temp. at 100° and bake for 3-4 hours, rotating occasionally until done. Turn off heat and leave in the oven to cool. Then paint with acrylic paints.

Folk Art Nativity Scene - A kid-friendly homemade Nativity scene can be created out of pipe cleaners and yarn, as seen in *Family Fun* magazine: jas.familyfun.go.com/arts-and-crafts?page=CraftDisplay&craftid=11151

Toy Nativity Scene - Find a cardboard shoe box. Remove the top lid and set the box on its side. Glue craft sticks around three sides of the box, and place another row of sticks cantilevered along the top edge for an overhang. This will be the stable. Set the box inside the lid. This will be the fenced-in yard. Complete the scene with plastic farm animals and toy people. Young children love to pretend and role play, and this allows them to reenact the events of the Nativity in their own way.

LEGO® Nativity Scene - Build a Nativity model out of LEGO® bricks, minifigures, and special pieces. For a good example of one, visit this site: www.thereverend.com/lego/nativity001.html; or follow these diagrams for a LEGO® crèche: <http://staff.science.uva.nl/~leo/lego/nativity.html>.

Graham Cracker Crèche - Make an A-frame stable out of three graham crackers. Lay one graham cracker down flat for the base, and place the other two crackers on top to form a triangle. Stick them together with frosting. For the manger, fill an empty walnut shell with flaked coconut or a crumbled piece of shredded wheat. Baby Jesus can be a tiny peanut. Use double peanuts for standing figures, with the smaller end as the head. (If anyone has peanut allergies in your household, try using pretzel nuggets instead.) Wrap with little squares of cloth.

Nativity Map - Draw or trace a map of the Holy Land. Label landmarks and towns. Track Joseph and Mary's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. How many miles did they travel? What route might they have taken?

Hay and/or Straw

The words “hay” and “straw” are often used interchangeably, even when telling the story of the Nativity, but they are not really the same thing.

Hay can be any of several kinds of nutritional grasses and legumes (such as alfalfa, clover, and timothy grass) that are cut and baled while still green, then dried and used as fodder for livestock. Haymaking in the United States is a large industry. Hay is cut when it is still flowering and before going to seed, to retain all of the valuable food elements that are in the plant. The cut hay is spread evenly across a field to dry in the sun for about three days. The dry hay is pressed into bales and bound together in large bundles. Hay is stored and kept for livestock to feed on over the winter. Hay is also shipped to parts of the country where it does not grow naturally, so farm animals anywhere can be given food.

Straw is the dry stalks of cereal grain plants (such as wheat, barley, oats, and rye) that are left after the seeds of the plants have been harvested. Straw is used for many different purposes. Since it is light, warm, and absorbent, straw is used mostly as a livestock bedding material, roofing thatch, and to make straw bale walls. The dry, hollow stems make it a great insulator. Some kinds of straw are woven into material for hats, handbags, rugs and mats. For many years, people slept on mattresses filled with straw. In certain parts of the world, straw mats are still used for beds today. Straw can be used as garden mulch, or it can be cut and baled like hay. Layers of straw are even put in between bales of hay to absorb moisture. Straw can be fed to cattle and other animals, but it is composed mostly of cellulose and lignin, the same ingredients as wood, so it has little nutritional value and doesn't taste as good as hay.

See: www.hayinart.com/000117.html for paintings of hay and haystacks. Gather some straw, and also some hay if possible. What does it feel like? What does it smell like? Would it make for a comfortable bed? Do you think Christ's manger was filled with straw or hay? Explain your reasons.

Nativity Party

“Alleluia! O how the angels sang. Alleluia! How it rang! And the sky was bright with a holy light. ’Twas the birthday of a King.” ~From *Birthday of a King*, by William H. Neidlinger, 1890.

Christmas celebrates the life of our Savior. Do you want to have a Nativity party based on the true meaning of the season? Host a birthday party for Jesus! For an interesting viewpoint on this topic, read “The Birthday Party” at: www.new-life.net/chrtms03.htm.

Invitations - Create your own invitations using nativity clip art, or buy a box of Christmas cards (preferably with a Nativity picture on the front) and insert a note inside each card.

Decorations - Make a “HAPPY BIRTHDAY JESUS” banner. Hang red, white, and green balloons. Display a Nativity scene as a centerpiece.

Refreshments - Serve Christmas cookies along with red and green Jell-O. Make the Jell-O according to the package directions, then pour the Jell-O into small paper cups and refrigerate. If desired, top with whipped cream or small marshmallows before serving.

Cake - An angel food cake would be perfect for this party! Place a tall candle inside the hole at the center of the cake. Light the candle and sing “Happy Birthday, Dear Jesus.” Or you could have a sheet cake with the words “Happy Birthday Jesus” on it and regular-sized birthday candles.

Songs - Sing carols and “The Birthday of a King.” (Download the score and MIDI music at www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/b/i/birthday.htm.) Visit www.christmasislove.com/happybirthdayjesus.htm for a “Happy Birthday Jesus” song from *Christmas is Love* by Joseph Francis Michael Pokorny. In addition, a collection of fun and easy-to-learn “Jesus is Born” children’s songs can be found at http://perpetualpreschool.com/christianthemes/bible_themes/christian_christmas_songs.htm. (continued on next page)

4

Nativity Activities ... Page 13

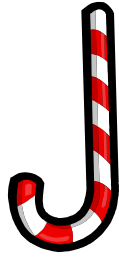
Activities - Go Christmas caroling. Tell the story of Jesus' birth. Dress up as Mary, Joseph, shepherds and wise men. Act out parts of the Christmas story. Put on a Nativity puppet show. Watch a video such as Hanna-Barbera's *The Nativity*.

Craft - Obtain paper crowns from Burger King, one for each child, and let the children decorate their crowns by gluing on plastic jewels, sequins, glitter, holiday stickers, foam craft shapes, or geometric shapes cut from colored construction paper. Tell the story about the birth of the baby King on the first Christmas, and of the Three Kings who came bearing gifts.

Gift Giving - You might have a white elephant or homemade gift exchange. Even better, you could take up a collection of toys for a needy family, monetary donations for a charitable organization, canned goods for the local food bank, or baby supplies for a pregnancy resource center. (As an alternative to a "Birthday Party for Jesus," some people have a "Baby Shower for Jesus" in honor of the precious child whose birth we celebrate. Guests bring baby blankets, bottles, bibs, diapers, etc. which are then presented to a crisis pregnancy center, a shelter for homeless families, or a home for unwed mothers. These items are a blessing for young moms who give the gift of life to their babies despite difficult circumstances.)

Gifts for Jesus - Have everyone take turns answering this question: "Since it's Jesus' birthday, what gift will you give Him this coming year?" Or ask each of the children to think of something that he or she would like to do for Jesus by helping another person. (For example: babysitting, helping parents, offering to run an errand, doing yard work, washing the car, walking the dog, reading to a child, tutoring a student, lending a toy to a brother or sister, etc.) Have the children write their idea on a 3x5 card and place it in an envelope that they decorate. These can then be presented as a gift certificate to the person for whom the special deed will be done.

Party Favors - Fill small Christmas stockings with a Bible tract and/or inexpensive stocking stuffer; or hand out large candy canes onto which you have tied a paper scroll explaining the symbolism of the candy cane. (The following page can be copied and cut out for this purpose.)



The Candy Cane

The candy cane is shaped like a letter “J” for Jesus, or turned upside down it resembles a shepherd’s staff. The shepherds were the first to visit Baby Jesus, and Jesus himself was called “The Good Shepherd.”

The candy cane is a sugary stick of pure white, hard candy. White symbolizes the holiness of Jesus and His sinless life. The candy tastes sweet just like God’s sweet love for us. The candy’s hardness reminds us that Jesus is our rock of refuge, and His promises are a solid foundation for those who follow Him.

Some candy canes have red and green stripes. Red symbolizes the blood that Jesus shed for us. Green represents the new life that we have in Christ.

The flavor of the candy cane is peppermint, which is similar to hyssop, a member of the mint family. In Old Testament times, hyssop was associated with purification and sacrifice. Jesus is the Lamb of God, come to be a sacrifice for the sins of this world.

Every time you see or eat a candy cane, remember that Jesus is the reason for the season!

Merry Christmas!

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Merry Christmas!

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Christmas Word Find

Did You Know...? The word "Christmas" literally means "Christ's mass." It comes from the Middle English *Christemasse*, originally *Cristes mæsse* in Old English. The suffix "*mass*" means a festival, feast, or celebration. In Romance languages, a derivative of "nativity" is used - such as the Spanish "Navidad" - because the holiday commemorates Christ's Nativity.

See how many words you make out of these letters:

C H R I S T M A S

- | | |
|-----|-----|
| 1. | 16. |
| 2. | 17. |
| 3. | 18. |
| 4. | 19. |
| 5. | 20. |
| 6. | 21. |
| 7. | 22. |
| 8. | 23. |
| 9. | 24. |
| 10. | 25. |
| 11. | 26. |
| 12. | 27. |
| 13. | 28. |
| 14. | 29. |
| 15. | 30. |

Nativity Music

From the first angelic choir over Bethlehem, carols have rung joyously through the centuries to praise God for sending His Son. While carols are sometimes found in hymn books, a Christmas carol's content as well as its verse structure and musical style is distinct from the hymn. Carols focus more on the drama of the Nativity with its cast of shepherds, wise men, stars, animals, and Baby Jesus rather than on the direct worship of God.

St. Francis of Assisi is credited with being the originator of the Christmas crèche, bringing about a new interest in the Nativity and songs of our Savior's birth. The image of the Baby Jesus lying in a manger surrounded by animals, as promoted by Francis and his followers, was to feature prominently in many carols such as "The Friendly Beasts."

Sing or listen to the following Christmas carols. How do they relate to the events of the Nativity?

- Angels from the Realms of Glory
- Angels We Have Heard on High
- Away in a Manger
- Go Tell it on the Mountain
- God Rest You Merry Gentlemen
- Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
- It Came Upon a Midnight Clear
- Joy to the World
- Little Town of Bethlehem
- Mary Had a Baby
- O Come, All Ye Faithful
- O Holy Night
- Silent Night
- The First Noel
- We Three Kings of Orient Are
- What Child is This?
- While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night

See also: www.hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com, an online treasury of Christmas hymns and carols; and www.allthingschristmas.com/music.html offering lyrics and music for more than 50 holiday songs including your favorite classic Christmas carols. Enjoy the sounds of the season right on your computer. Click on the musical note next to a song to listen to the music while singing along, or view and print the lyrics for going caroling.

Christmas Carol Survey - Ask friends, neighbors, and family members what their favorite carols are. Keep track of everyone's answers and create a graph to show the results. What are the most popular Christmas carols?

Nativity Poetry

The Nativity has inspired many great writers to create thoughtful works of poetry based on the event. These provide a good introduction to poetic literature. The famous poems listed on this page can be found in poetry anthologies or by searching on the internet. In addition, the following pages feature some favorite verses related to the Nativity for you to read, ponder, and recite at Christmas. Try writing your own Nativity poem, too.

A Christmas Carol, by G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936)

A Christmas Carol, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)

A Hymn on the Nativity of My Savior, by Ben Jonson (1572-1637)

An Ode of the Birth of our Savior, by Robert Herrick (1591-1674)

Christmas Carol, by Sara Teasdale (1884-1933)

Christmas Day, by John Meade Falkner (1858-1922)

Christ's Nativity, by Henry Vaughan (1621-1695)

In the Bleak Midwinter, Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

Journey of the Magi, by T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)

Mary and Gabriel, by Rupert Brooke (1887-1915)

Nativity, by John Donne (1572-1631)

Nativity, by James Montgomery (1771-1854)

Nativity Song, by Jacopone da Todi (c. 1230–1306)

On the Morning of Christ's Nativity, by John Milton (1608-1674)

The Incarnation, Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

The Nativity, by Christopher Harvey (1597-1663)

The Song of the Virgin Mary, by Miles Coverdale (c. 1488-1569)

The True Christmas, by Henry Vaughan (1621-1695)

Upon Christ His Birth, by Sir John Suckling (1609-1642)

See also: www.hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com (click on Poetry & Prose) and www.xmaspoetry.com for more classic Christmas poems.

Nativity Activities ... Page 19

“His place of birth a solemn angel tells to simple shepherds keeping watch by night; they gladly thither haste, and by a choir of squadron’d angels hear His carol sung.” ~John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

* * *

“At thy nativity a glorious quire of Angels, in the fields of Bethlehem, sung to shepherds, watching at their folds by night, and told them the Messiah now was born, where they might see him; and to thee they came, directed to the manger where thou lay’st; for in the inn was left no better room.” ~John Milton, *Paradise Regained*

* * *

Nativity Song

By Jacopone da Todi

(c. 1230–1306)

The beautiful Mother is bending
Low where her baby lies
Helpless and frail, for her tending:
But she knows the glorious eyes.
The Mother smiles and rejoices
While the Baby laughs in the hay,
She listens to heavenly voices:
“This Child shall be King some day.”
O dear little Child in the manger,
Let me make merry with Thee,
O King, in my hour of danger,
Wilt Thou be strong for me?

* * *

What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man, I would do my part;
Yet what can I give Him: give my heart.
~Christina Rossetti, *In the Bleak Midwinter*

A Hymn on the Nativity of My Savior

By Ben Jonson (1572-1637)

I sing the birth was born tonight,
The Author both of life and light;
The angels so did sound it,
And like the ravished shepherds said,
Who saw the light, and were afraid,
Yet searched, and true they found it.

The Son of God, the eternal King,
That did us all salvation bring,
And freed the soul from danger;
He whom the whole world could not take,
The Word, which heaven and earth did make,
Was now laid in a manger.

The Father's wisdom willed it so,
The Son's obedience knew no "No,"
Both wills were in one stature;
And as that wisdom had decreed,
The Word was now made Flesh indeed,
And took on Him our nature.

What comfort by Him do we win?
Who made Himself the Prince of sin,
To make us heirs of glory?
To see this Babe, all innocence,
A Martyr born in our defense,
Can man forget this story?

On the Morning of Christ's Nativity

By John Milton (1608–1674)

This is the month, and this the happy morn,
Wherein the Son of Heav'n's Eternal King,
Of wedded Maid and Virgin Mother born,
Our great redemption from above did bring;
For so the holy sages once did sing
That He our deadly forfeit should release,
And with His Father work us a perpetual peace.
That glorious Form, that Light unsufferable,
And that far-beaming blaze of Majesty,
Wherewith He went at Heav'n's high council-table
To sit the midst of Trinal Unity,
He laid aside; and, here with us to be,
Forsook the courts of everlasting day,
And chose with us a darksome house of mortal clay.
Say, Heavenly Muse, shall not thy sacred vein
Afford a present to the Infant God?
Hast thou no verse, no hymn, or solemn strain,
To welcome Him to this His new abode,
Now while the Heaven, by the sun's team untrod,
Hath took no print of the approaching light,
And all the spangled host keep watch in squadrons bright?
See how from far upon the eastern road
The star-led wizards haste with odours sweet:
O run, prevent them with thy humble ode,
And lay it lowly at His blessed feet;
Have thou the honour first thy Lord to greet,
And join thy voice unto the Angel choir,
From out his secret altar touched with hallowed fire.

A Christmas Carol

by Samuel Taylor Coleridge
(1772-1834)

I
The shepherds went their hasty way,
And found the lowly stable-shed
Where the Virgin-Mother lay:
And now they checked their eager tread,
For to the Babe, that at her bosom clung,
A Mother's song the Virgin-Mother sung.

II
They told her how a glorious light,
Streaming from a heavenly throng.
Around them shone, suspending night!
While sweeter than a mother's song,
Blest Angels heralded the Savior's birth,
Glory to God on high! And Peace on Earth.

III
She listened to the tale divine,
And closer still the Babe she pressed:
And while she cried, the Babe is mine!
The milk rushed faster to her breast:
Joy rose within her, like a summer's morn;
Peace, Peace on Earth! The Prince of Peace is born.

IV
Thou Mother of the Prince of Peace,
Poor, simple, and of low estate!
That strife should vanish, battle cease,
O why should this thy soul elate?
Sweet Music's loudest note, the Poet's story,-
Didst thou ne'er love to hear of fame and glory?

(continued on next page)

A Christmas Carol *(continued)*

V

And is not War a youthful king,
A stately Hero clad in mail?
Beneath his footsteps laurels spring;
Him Earth's majestic monarchs hail
Their friends, their playmate! And his bold bright eye
Compels the maiden's love-confessing sigh.

VI

Tell this in some more courtly scene,
To maids and youths in robes of state!
I am a woman poor and mean,
And wherefore is my soul elate.
War is a ruffian, all with guilt defiled,
That from the aged father's tears his child!

VII

A murderous fiend, by fiends adored,
He kills the sire and starves the son;
The husband kills, and from her board
Steals all his widow's toil had won;
Plunders God's world of beauty; rends away
All safety from the night, all comfort from the day .

VIII

Then wisely is my soul elate,
That strife should vanish, battle cease:
I'm poor and of low estate,
The Mother of the Prince of Peace.
Joy rises in me, like a summer's morn:
Peace, Peace on Earth! The Prince of Peace is born!'

Nativity Art

The Nativity story has inspired many artists to create beautifully detailed, dramatic, and often symbolic paintings depicting the event. Studying these works is a great way for children to be introduced to classic art.

Below are links to famous paintings related to the Nativity. Explain to your children that these images are the artist's interpretation of what he imagined the Nativity was like. Note the date of each painting and state the artist's name. These artists have kept the Nativity story alive for hundreds of years through their paintings, which people continue to view in museums all around the world.

www.merry-christmas.com/famous_paintings/famous.index.htm (See 20 Famous Historical Nativity Paintings at this site.)

www.textweek.com/art/nativity.htm (Links to images of the Nativity.)

www.textweek.com/art/shepherds.htm (Links to images of Shepherds at the Nativity, listed in chronological order.)

www.textweek.com/art/magi.htm (Links to images of Magi at the Nativity, listed in chronological order.)

www.threemonkeysonline.com/printable.php?id=340 ("The Image of Christmas - The Nativity Represented in Art," by Dr. Catherine Lawless.)

www.artchive.com/artchive/B/botticelli/mystical_nativity.jpg.html

The Mystical Nativity (image on front cover of this e-book) is a literary picture to be enjoyed by more than the eyes alone, as it is read and slowly un-riddled in the light of what we know about the painter and his times.

Be an Artist - Create your own masterpiece showing a scene from the Nativity such as Mary and Joseph's Journey, Baby Jesus in the Manger, Shepherds in the Field, Three Wise Men Bringing Gifts, etc.

Nativity Movies / DVD's

The Nativity Story (2006, PG) - This movie is based on the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, while also incorporating ideas from popular tradition. The dialogue stays true to Scripture and the circumstances provide a realistic view into the culture and customs of the time. Visit *The Nativity Story* website: www.thenativitystory.com.

The Nativity (1986) - This animated cartoon by Hanna-Barbera is one in a series of "Greatest Adventure Stories from the Bible," as seen through the eyes of three young visitors from the 20th century. In this episode, all roads lead to Bethlehem as God fulfills a prophecy and a promise.

Jesus of Nazareth (1977) - Director Franco Zeffirelli's comprehensive, realistic film about the life and ministry of Christ. The set design and costumes were painstakingly researched, and dialogue was lifted straight out of the Gospels. The movie's cast of thousands includes cameos by some of the most distinguished actors of all time. Zeffirelli devotes an hour to the details surrounding Christ's birth, in this chronological movie that runs over six hours in length.

The Little Drummer Boy (1968) - An orphan drummer boy who hates the human race finds his life changed forever when he meets three wise men on route to Bethlehem. Having no gift for Baby Jesus, the boy plays a song on his drum. It's a moving message of hope and healing, as the boy discovers that a babe in a manger is the only one who can truly help him.

On Assignment: Geography of the Promised Land (2005) - An award-winning multi-media unit study that integrates interactive maps, scenic geographic video, motion graphics, Bible text, and outstanding teaching. Students will gain new insights into how God's creation and His words fit together to tell His story. Includes five lessons on two DVD's, a student workbook, and 80-page instructor's manual. Lessons include: Geographic Features, Geographic Regions, Climate and Geology, Geography and the Bible, Review and Assessment. Order online at www.sycamorepress.com.

Internet Resources

www.topmarks.co.uk/christianity/nativity/index.htm - A fun, colorfully illustrated online story about the birth of Jesus suitable for 6-11 year olds.

<http://akidsheart.com/holidays/christms/nativity.htm> - A simple drag-and-drop Nativity scene for little kids to arrange and re-arrange.

www.snaithprimary.eril.net/nativity.htm - Interactive online Nativity Kit with ten pages of drag-and-drop pictures for creating different scenes.

www.teacherhelp.org/chris.htm - Inspirational Nativity web links.

www.ehow.com/how_11777_re-enact-nativity.html - How to re-enact the Nativity. Re-creating the Nativity can become a treasured family tradition in which everyone participates. Make the costumes as simple or as complicated as you wish; the message is the most important thing.

www.nativityplay.com - A complete Bible-based musical Nativity play.

www.dramatix.org - Free Nativity play scripts.

<http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/dovecot/Pages/FullSongList.htm> - Songs based on the Christmas story, for use in Christmas pageants and nativity plays.

www.nativitytraditions.com - Nativity scenes as a family tradition.

<http://nebraskafamilytimes.net/nativity.htm> - This "Nativity Tradition PDF" contains everything you need to begin a precious Christmas Nativity Tradition for your family, while blessing another family at the same time.

<http://biblestudies.stores.yahoo.net/nativity.html> - Study the Nativity with printable handouts and Bible study resources from *Christianity Today*.

www.thenativity.com - The birth of Jesus changed the world—and He can change your life too! This Nativity site invites visitors to accept Christ.

www.knowledgehouse.info/nativity.html - The Nativity Story and Nativity Activity e-book set, plus free printouts and more, from Knowledge House.

Additional References

A Classic Nativity Devotional, by James Stuart Bell.

Celebrate the nativity while enjoying the timeless wisdom of some of the greatest spiritual and literary figures of all time. From the inspirational words of Martin Luther, Charles Spurgeon, and Saint Augustine, to the lyric poetry of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Milton, and Christina Rossetti, this classic collection will warm your heart and touch your soul.

Child of the Promise, by Stormie Omartian.

Beautiful paintings by Jack Terry illustrate this large 9x11" book. Fifteen well-developed chapters bring rich detail, real emotion, and new meaning to the Nativity story. A wonderful, timeless tale for all ages and seasons.

Christ is Born, by Layne Haacke.

A lovely children's picture book that tells the Nativity story by using text comprised of actual verses (Luke 2:1-16) from the King James Bible.

Father and Son: A Nativity Story, by Geraldine McCaughrean.

This children's picture book takes the age-old Nativity story and tells it from a unique and different viewpoint, as Joseph ponders how he is going to raise Jesus not just as his stepson or as God's son, but as God incarnate.

Jesus' Christmas Party, by Nicholas Allan.

The Nativity story as told from the innkeeper's point of view. This book is well written with plenty of repetition, humor, and a satisfying ending that makes you want to read it again and again. A delightful family read-aloud.

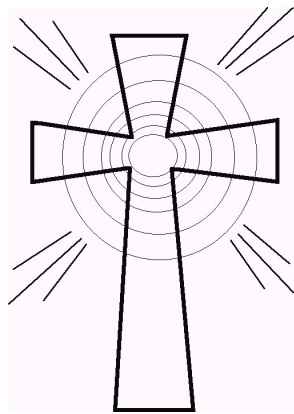
The First Christmas, by Paul L. Maier.

This informative book by a recognized historian delves into Christian, Jewish, Greek and Roman sources to provide fascinating facts and fresh insights into the Nativity. It's an interesting study of archaeology, history, economics, law, literature, geography and science as these subjects relate to the Nativity story. The book includes over fifty full-color photographs, paintings, and illustrations.

Postscript

Do you wish to know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? It's as easy as asking Him to come into your heart and life. If you would like to receive Christ's free gift of eternal life and know Jesus as your personal savior and friend, or if you are unsure whether you truly are born again, I urge you to say this simple prayer:

"Jesus, I believe that you are the Son of God and that you died on the cross to forgive my sins. Thank you! I want to know you, to follow you and have a personal relationship with you. Please come into my heart and make me a new creation in you. Amen."



"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you."

~Jeremiah 29:11-14

About the Author



Teri has loved books, reading, and writing ever since she can remember. Throughout school, her favorite subjects were English and literature. In her fourth grade journal, Teri wrote that she wanted to be a wife, mother, teacher, librarian, reporter, and author. While in high school, she wrote poetry and had one of her poems published. In college, she studied creative writing, children's literature, and library technology. Teri's home library contains over 5,000 books!

A lifelong learner, Teri enjoys researching and writing on a wide variety of topics. She is Arizona State Coordinator for *The Old Schoolhouse* magazine and the leader of Desert Hills Christian Homeschoolers. Teri writes a weekly "Not Just For Kids" column for *The Desert Advocate* newspaper and wrote *Learning for Life: Educational Words of Wisdom*, a book of quotations. In addition, her articles have appeared in many publications. Teri lives in Arizona with her husband and three sons. Visit her website: www.KnowledgeHouse.info.



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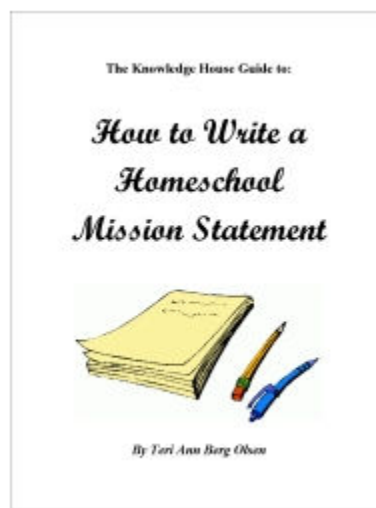
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Nativity Activities

- Nativity Quiz Questions
- Nativity Vocabulary
- Nativity Word Search
- Nativity Word Scramble
- Christmas Word Find
- Internet Resources
- Additional References
- Nativity Traditions
- Projects & Crafts
- Host a Nativity Party
- Nativity Music
- Nativity Poetry
- Nativity Art
- Movies/Multimedia

Teri Ann Berg Olsen is a newspaper columnist, home educator, and author of *Learning for Life: Educational Words of Wisdom*, a book of quotations.

Visit her website: www.KnowledgeHouse.info