

Seeking Jesus

Q: Do you know what the word seek means? (Wait for answers.) The word seek means: “to go in search of something, to look for, or to try to discover.” Have you ever tried to seek something? (A lost shoe, or sock, or puzzle piece, your car keys? Did you find it? How did you feel when you found it?)

The Wise Men followed a star from a far country (probably modern day Iraq) to seek a king.

Q: Why do you think it was important for these wise men to “seek” a king? (Because a king is a special person. A king is in charge of a kingdom. He has power and influence.)

Q: Do you think it was a hard or easy trip for them to make? (It was a long trip, on camels or on foot, over rough terrain. But the wise men knew that the hard trip was worth it to see a king.)

Jesus tells us: Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)

Q: If we want to seek Jesus during this Christmas season, what is a good way for us to do that? (By decorating the house, listening to music, wrapping presents, serving others.)

The best way to seek Jesus is to study the Bible, the Word of God. Let’s make a promise to read the Bible together as a family over the next 24 days. Just like the wise men learned on their journey, it may be hard for us to seek Him every day. But with God’s help, nothing is impossible!

Prayer: Lord, will you help us as we seek the real reason that we celebrate Christmas: Your Son, Jesus? Please help us to find time in our busy schedule to do this. We want to know You better! In Jesus’ Name we pray, Amen.

Written by
Margie Sanford

Seeking Jesus

John 1:1-51

The Word (Christ) was in the beginning. The Word was with God. The Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 He made all things. Nothing was made without Him making it. 4 Life began by Him. His Life was the Light for men. 5 The Light shines in the darkness. The darkness has never been able to put out the Light.

John begins his story about Jesus similar to how the first book of the bible, Genesis, starts: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." V.1

Q: What are some of the things God created? (land, sky, sea, plants, animals)

God created everything in the heavens and the earth. But, before the world was made, God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit lived. Jesus was not created. He lived before He was born. That's why John says, The Word was in the beginning.

Q: Why do you think it is important to know that Jesus existed before the world was created? (Because, this tells us that Jesus was not an ordinary baby. Jesus was God.)

John also tells us that that Jesus' life was "the Light for men."

Q: Which do you like better: light or darkness? Why? (In darkness you can't see. It's scary. You can get hurt or lost in darkness. In light you can find your way and see clearly.)

Jesus came to be Light, to overcome darkness, and to show us the way to God.

Prayer: We praise you, Jesus, because You have created a beautiful world for us to enjoy. Thank you, Jesus, for being light and for showing us the way to God the Father. Teach us to seek You and to know You more. In Your Name we pray, Amen.

Written by
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Isaiah 9:6-7

For to us a Child will be born. To us a Son will be given. And the rule of the nations will be on His shoulders. His name will be called Wonderful, Teacher, Powerful God, Father Who Lives Forever, Prince of Peace. 7 There will be no end to His rule and His peace, upon the throne of David and over his nation. He will build it to last and keep it strong with what is right and fair and good from that time and forever. The work of the Lord of All will do this.

Isaiah lived about 700 years before Jesus was born. That's a lot of years.

Q: How did he know about Jesus? (Let the kids try to figure an answer to this question.) God gave Isaiah a special gift to be able to speak His words to His people to encourage their hearts to trust in the Lord. Isaiah was called a prophet which means "one who speaks for God." Today, we have the Word of God to tell us about Jesus. But in those days, they needed prophets.

Q: Who in your life teaches you about God? (Parents, grandparents, Sunday School teachers, Youth leaders, Pastor.) Do these people use the Bible to teach you?

Isaiah said a lot of great things about Jesus. He said he would be called Wonderful, Teacher, Powerful God, Father Who Lives Forever, Prince of Peace.

Q: Which of these descriptions do you like best: Wonderful, Teacher, Powerful God, Father Who Lives Forever, or Prince of Peace? Which titles of Jesus mean most to you? (Make sure you discuss each attribute of Jesus: *He's Wonderful* -- there is no one like Him; *He's a Teacher* -- He teaches us about the Kingdom of God and about the Father so that we can know His character and His promises; *He's Powerful* -- Jesus healed the blind man, walked on water and rose from the dead; *He is a Father and lives forever* -- He provides for us and cares for us like a daddy and He can always be counted on because He is forever, no beginning and no end; *He is the Prince of Peace* -- Jesus makes a way for us to live together and be at peace with God because of He exchanged His life on the cross for our sinful lives. So now we have peace with God.)

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we praise You because You are a Wonderful God. We thank You for giving us people, like Isaiah, who can teach us about You. We thank You for Your Word which teaches us about Your character and Your promises. But most of all, we thank You because You have made a way for us to be at peace with God. You gave Your life so that we might know God and enjoy Him forever. Help us to know You better. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.

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Isaiah 11:6-10

The wolf will live with the lamb. The leopard will lie down with the baby goat. The calf and the young lion and the young fat animal will lie down together. And a little boy will lead them. 7 The cow and the bear will eat side by side. And their young will lie down together. The lion will eat straw like the ox. 8 The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra. And another child will put his hand in the hole of a snake whose bite is poison. 9 They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain. For the earth will be as full of much learning from the Lord as the seas are full of water. 10 In that day the nations will turn to the One from the family of Jesse. He will be honored by the people as someone special to see. And His place of rest will be full of His shining-greatness.

God gives Isaiah the prophet another message of hope to give to God's special people. It is an encouraging picture of what life will be like when Jesus returns.

Q: What do you think would happen if a wolf and a lamb were together? (Try not to be too graphic, but a wolf sees a lamb as food.) How about a cobra and a baby? (A cobra would be dangerous for a baby, or even most adults, to play with!)

Isaiah says that when Jesus comes back to be King (we are referring to Jesus' Second Coming) every knee will bow to Him. We can expect a world where there are no more enemies. There will be peace between God and His people and among all creatures. That is a message worth celebrating.

Q: How can knowing Jesus help you to get along with others? (Jesus teaches us to love and forgive. Because Jesus loves us, we can love one another.)

Q: Is there someone you want to show love to this Christmas season? How can you show your love? (Share a toy with your sister/brother/cousin; shovel a sidewalk for your neighbor; clear the dishes off the table for your family; donate food to a food pantry, purchase a gift for a family in the community, etc.)

Prayer: Lord, thank You for giving us a glimpse of the day when Jesus will return to be King. We look forward to a time when peace will reign. Help us to be at peace with everyone as far as is possible with us. Teach us to love one another as You have loved us. In Jesus Name, Amen.

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Jeremiah 33:14-15

'See, the days are coming,' says the Lord, 'when I will do what I promised to the people of Israel and the people of Judah. 15 In those days and at that time I will cause a right and good Branch of David to rise up. And He will do what is fair and right and good on the earth.'

Jeremiah was another prophet of God. He lived about 600 years before Jesus was born. He told God's special people that God would send His Promised One (Jesus) in days to come. Jeremiah told them that this Promised One would come from the family of King David (who killed Goliath). He also said that this Promised One would *do what is fair and right and good*.

Q: If you could do one thing to make the world a better and fair place, what would you do? (End wars, end poverty, end illness. Isn't this what we long for? When Jesus returns there will be no more war, no more tears, no more death.)

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, that we can look forward to a day when You will return again and do what is fair and right and good. Help us to be people who put our trust in You, even when things in this world are hard and unfair. Teach us to be doers, not just hearers, and give a glimpse of Your glory here on earth. . . until Your return. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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Luke 1:5-10

When Herod was king of the country of Judea, there was a Jewish religious leader named Zacharias. He worked for Abijah. His wife was of the family group of Aaron. Her name was Elizabeth. 6 They were right with God and obeyed the Jewish Law and did what the Lord said to do. 7 They had no children because Elizabeth was not able to have a child. Both of them were older people. 8 Zacharias was doing his work as a religious leader for God. 9 The religious leaders were given certain kinds of work to do. Zacharias was chosen to go to the house of God to burn special perfume. 10 Many people stood outside praying during the time the special perfume was burning.

400 years go by between when Malachi (the last prophet in the Old Testament) speaks God's message to His special people and John the Baptist appears. John will tell the people to Prepare the Way of the Lord. He will speak truth to God's people and tell them to give up their selfish ways and turn back to the Lord.

Zacharius and Elizabeth were older people. Even though they had no prophet to encourage them or to teach them, they continued to serve the Lord.

Q: If you couldn't go to church or read your Bible to know God or be encouraged by His Word, do you think you would still remain faithful to Him? (Why or why not?)

Q: How could you keep your faith growing and pass the truth about God on to others? (Memorizing scripture is helpful when you don't have a Bible. If you have it in your head and heart, you can encourage yourself and teach it to others. This is how people who live in countries where the Bible is not allowed are able to pass along Truth, by word of mouth.)

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, that You are not silent. You have given us Your written Word that we might know You. Help us to never take that gift for granted. Teach us ways to put Your Word on our hearts. May we also be people who freely share what You have taught us with others. May Your Word be a light to our feet and a lamp to our path. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Written by

Margie Sanford



Worthington
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Seeking Jesus

Luke 1:11-17

Zacharias saw an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar where the special perfume was burning. 12 When he saw the angel, Zacharias was troubled and afraid. 13 The angel said to him, "Zacharias, do not be afraid. Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will give birth to a son. You are to name him John. 14 You will be glad and have much joy. Many people will be happy because he is born. 15 He will be great in the sight of the Lord and will never drink wine or any strong drink. Even from his birth, he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. 16 Many of the Jews will be turned to the Lord their God by him. 17 He will be the one to go in the spirit and power of Elijah before Christ comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children. He will teach those who do not obey to be right with God. He will get people ready for the Lord."

Angels are special messengers of God. They appear a number of times throughout the Christmas Story.

Q: How would you feel if an angel appeared to you? Would you be afraid or would you be happy? (Why or why not?)

Q: How did Zacharias feel about the angel? What did the angel say to help Zacharias? (Do not be afraid. Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will give birth to a son.)

Q: Would it comfort you to know that the Lord has heard your prayers?

The angel tells Zacharias many things about his soon-to-be born son. He tells him that his name will be John. Do you know what that name means? It means: The Lord is gracious. God was gracious to Zacharias and Elizabeth to give them a son, one they had waited for and hoped for. The Lord was kind and compassionate to them.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord for reminding us through the story of Zacharias and Elizabeth that You hear our prayers and that You are always gracious, kind and compassionate to us. We praise You for Your steadfast goodness that never fails. Help us, when we are afraid, to put our trust in You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Written by
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Luke 1:18-25

Zacharias said to the angel, “How can I know this for sure? I am old and my wife is old also.” 19 The angel said to him, “My name is Gabriel. I stand near God. He sent me to talk to you and bring to you this good news. 20 See! You will not be able to talk until the day this happens. It is because you did not believe my words. What I said will happen at the right time.” 21 The people outside were waiting. They were surprised and wondered why Zacharias stayed so long in the house of God. 22 When he came out, he could not talk to them. They knew he had seen something special from God while he was in the house of God. He tried to talk to them with his hands but could say nothing. 23 When his days of working in the house of God were over, he went to his home. 24 Some time later Elizabeth knew she was to become a mother. She kept herself hidden for five months. She said, 25 “This is what the Lord has done for me. He has looked on me and has taken away my shame from among men.”

Sometimes we ask questions because we want to learn something that we don't understand. But sometimes we ask questions because we don't trust what has been said. Zacharias doubted what God's messenger told him and he wanted a sign or some proof. The angel gave him proof in an unusual way: Zacharias lost his voice!

Q: Do you believe what your parents tell you? Have your parents ever asked you to do something that you don't think is best? (Like: eat vegetables, go to bed on time, brush your teeth, etc.?) God places people in our lives to be His messengers of His love for us. Your mom and dad are God's representatives of His protection, His love, and His care for you.

Most importantly, God gives us His Word to teach us what He wants us to know about Himself and His kingdom.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for giving me a mom and dad who love me. Thank you for Your Word that teaches me about Your goodness and faithfulness to me. Help me to spend time listening to and reading Your Word. Give me a grateful and humble heart that trusts what You say instead of questioning Your Word. In Jesus' Name, Amen!

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Luke 1:26-38

Six months after Elizabeth knew she was to become a mother, Gabriel was sent from God to Nazareth. Nazareth was a town in the country of Galilee. 27 He went to a woman who had never had a man. Her name was Mary. She was promised in marriage to a man named Joseph. Joseph was of the family of David. 28 The angel came to her and said, "You are honored very much. You are a favored woman. The Lord is with you. *You are chosen from among many women." 29 When she saw the angel, she was troubled at his words. She thought about what had been said. 30 The angel said to her, "Mary, do not be afraid. You have found favor with God. 31 See! You are to become a mother and have a Son. You are to give Him the name Jesus. 32 He will be great. He will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the place where His early father David sat. 33 He will be King over the family of Jacob forever and His nation will have no end." 34 Mary said to the angel, "How will this happen? I have never had a man." 35 The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come on you. The power of the Most High will cover you. The holy Child you give birth to will be called the Son of God. 36 "See, your cousin Elizabeth, as old as she is, is going to give birth to a child. She was not able to have children before, but now she is in her sixth month. 37 For God can do all things." 38 Then Mary said, "I am willing to be used of the Lord. Let it happen to me as you have said." Then the angel went away from her.

Do you remember yesterday's lesson? Zacharias didn't believe what the angel, Gabriel, said to him. He questioned God's plan. But Gabriel went to Mary to tell her God would give her a baby. This plan didn't make sense, but Mary trusted and believed Gabriel's message. We know this because she says, "*I am willing to be used of the Lord. Let it happen to me as you have said.*"

Mary must have been a very special woman. God chose her to be Jesus' mother. She got to hold baby Jesus in her arms and to watch him take his first steps.

Q: How do you think Mary's willingness to accept God's plan (her humility) make her a perfect mother for Jesus? (God had a plan from before the foundation of the earth that Jesus would die on a cross for our sins. Remember, being the mother of Jesus wasn't easy. Mary was at the foot of the cross when Jesus died.)

Q: Discuss a time when you and your family had to accept a hard plan from God. (An illness, a friend moves away, someone close to you dies, etc.) How can we learn from Mary about how to handle God's plan?

Prayer: Lord, sometimes life is hard. Sometimes Your plans are not our plans. Your ways are not our ways. But we want to trust You, Lord, when we don't understand. Help us to believe, as Mary did, that all things work together for good for those who love You and are called according to Your purpose. Give us hearts that are willing to be used by You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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Matthew 1:18-21

The birth of Jesus Christ was like this: Mary His mother had been promised in marriage to Joseph. Before they were married, it was learned that she was to have a baby by the Holy Spirit. 19 Joseph was her promised husband. He was a good man and did not want to make it hard for Mary in front of people. He thought it would be good to break the promised marriage without people knowing it. 20 While he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. She is to become a mother by the Holy Spirit. 21 A Son will be born to her. You will give Him the name Jesus because He will save His people from the punishment of their sins.”

Another angel. Another message. Joseph needed to know that God had a plan for him to marry Mary. God chose Joseph to be a daddy to Jesus. He was a kind man who was a good provider for his family. Joseph was a carpenter and Jesus learned how to make things by spending time with him.

Q: What is your favorite thing to do with your dad (or a special man that the Lord has placed in your life)? (Hunting, fishing, watching football, playing games, doing chores, etc.?)

The angel tells Joseph that the baby’s name will be “*Jesus*” because *He will save His people*.

Q: Why do people need a Savior? (Because *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and the wages of sin is death*.)

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for giving us fathers and other special men who love us and spend time with us. Give them tender hearts and teach them more about You so that we can learn from them. Thank you for giving us Jesus, our Savior, so that our sin can be washed away and we can belong to Your family forever. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

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Matthew 1:22-25

This happened as the Lord said it would happen through the early preacher. 23 He said, "The young woman, who has never had a man, will give birth to a Son. They will give Him the name Immanuel. This means God with us." 24 Joseph awoke from his sleep. He did what the angel of the Lord told him to do. He took Mary as his wife. 25 But he did not have her, as a husband has a wife, until she gave birth to a Son. Joseph gave Him the name Jesus.

Do you remember the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, from Days 3 and 4? He spoke a message of comfort to God's people 700 years before Jesus' birth. Isaiah (7:14) said:

So the Lord Himself will give you a special thing to see: A young woman, who has never had a man, will give birth to a son. She will give Him the name Immanuel.

These are the same words that Matthew used to show that Jesus is the Promised One. The words of Isaiah tell us another name for Jesus. It's Immanuel which means, God with us.

Q: Is it a comfort for you to know that God is with us? If God is with us, how does this make a difference to you? (It helps me when I am afraid or have to face hard things. It gives me courage.)

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for the encouraging words that you gave to Isaiah, 700 years before Jesus was born. Knowing that You are always with us gives us peaceful hearts when we have to face hard things. Help us to always remember that You are near. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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Luke 1:39-45

At once Mary went from there to a town in the hill country of Judea. 40 She went to the house of Zacharias to see Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary speak, the baby moved in her body. At the same time Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 Elizabeth spoke in a loud voice, "You are honored among women! Your Child is honored! 43 Why has this happened to me? Why has the mother of my Lord come to me? 44 As soon as I heard your voice, the baby in my body moved for joy. 45 You are happy because you believed. Everything will happen as the Lord told you it would happen."

What a great comfort and joy it must have been for Mary and Elizabeth to share the experience of being pregnant together. Even their babies recognized one another!

It is a gift to have friends and family who understand and share life together. The word fellowship describes the kind of relationship that believers of Jesus have with other people who love and follow Jesus.

Q: Who do you consider a close friend who you can talk to about Jesus? Who is someone at church, school or work that you can talk with who understands you and encourages you in your faith? Is there someone who you try to encourage?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for putting people in our lives who can help us to grow in our relationship with You. Thank You for the joy we feel when we get together to worship You on Sundays or study Your Word. Help us to be encouraging to one another as we seek to know You better. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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Luke 1:46-56

Then Mary said, "My heart sings with thanks for my Lord. 47 And my spirit is happy in God, the One Who saves from the punishment of sin. 48 The Lord has looked on me, His servant-girl and one who is not important. But from now on all people will honor me. 49 He Who is powerful has done great things for me. His name is holy. 50 The loving-kindness of the Lord is given to the people of all times who honor Him. 51 He has done powerful works with His arm. He has divided from each other those who have pride in their hearts. 52 He has taken rulers down from their thrones. He has put those who are in a place that is not important to a place that is important. 53 He has filled those who are hungry with good things. He has sent the rich people away with nothing. 54 He has helped Israel His servant. This was done to remember His loving-kindness. 55 He promised He would do this to our early fathers and to Abraham and to his family forever." 56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months. Then she went to her own home.

Mary's Song is a beautiful testimony of God's goodness and faithfulness. As she grew up, she must have heard and believed many stories about God's character and promises. Here are some of the things she says in her song:

- He is powerful.
- He has done great things.
- His name is holy.
- His loving-kindness is for people who honor Him.
- He fills the hungry with good things.
- He fulfills His promises.

Q: Which characteristic of God do you appreciate the most? Can you remember a time when God has shown His power, or done great things, or fulfilled His promises?

Prayer: We praise You, O God, for Your loving-kindness and faithfulness to us. Help us to learn to sing Your praises, just as Mary did, by remembering the times when You have been faithful in the past. Help us to encourage others to put their trust in You as they remember Your promises. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Written by
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Micah 5:2-5

2 "Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are too little to be among the family groups of Judah. But from you One will come who will rule for Me in Israel. His coming was planned long ago, from the beginning." 3 He will give them up until the time when the woman in pain gives birth to a child. Then the rest of His brothers will return to the people of Israel. 4 And He will come and feed His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the great power of the name of the Lord His God. His people will live there and be safe, because at that time He will be great to the ends of the earth. 5 And He will be their peace.

Micah was a prophet (one who spoke God's words) during the same years that Isaiah was a prophet, 700 years before the birth of Jesus. These were dark days for the special people of God because they refused to honor and obey Him. Still, Micah had words of hope for the people of God:

- The Promised One (Jesus) will come from Bethlehem (where King David was born).
- The Promised One's arrival was planned from the beginning.
- He will come and feed His flock in the strength of the Lord.
- He will be their peace.

God had planned Jesus' birth, life and death before the world was created. He knew that people would turn their hearts away from worshipping Him in order to do what was right in their own eyes. God chose to send His Son, Jesus, to rescue people by showing His great love for them through Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus exchanged His perfect, sinless life on the cross for our rebellious, sinful lives.

Here are a couple ways Micah describes Jesus:

- Jesus is a Great Shepherd who cares for us, His sheep, by leading us to green pastures and cool waters, and by using a rod and staff to discipline and protect us.
- Jesus is our peace because He has made it possible for us, even while we were still His enemies, to become friends with God through His sacrifice upon the cross.

Q: Which description of Jesus do you like better: Jesus is a Great Shepherd or Jesus is our peace? Why?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for having a plan in place to show us Your love through Jesus. As stubborn sheep, we need Your help to guide us. As self-centered enemies, we need Your redeeming love so we can have peace with You. Thank You for Micah's example of someone who reminded people of Your promises during dark times. Teach us how to be messengers of Your good news about Jesus. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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Luke 2:1-72

In those days Caesar Augustus sent out word that the name of every person in the Roman nation must be written in the books of the nation. 2 This first writing took place while Quirinius was ruler of Syria. 3 So all the people went to their own cities to have their names written in the books of the nation. 4 Joseph went up from the town of Nazareth in the country of Galilee to the town of Bethlehem. It was known as the city of David. He went there because he was from the family of David. 5 Joseph went to have his and Mary's names written in the books of the nation. Mary was his promised wife and soon to become a mother. 6 While they were there in Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to give birth to her baby. 7 Her first son was born. She put cloth around Him and laid Him in a place where cattle are fed. There was no room for them in the place where people stay for the night.

Prophets from the Old Testament said that the long-awaited, Promised One would be born in Bethlehem, the birthplace of King David. But, how could that happen if Bethlehem was 92 miles from Nazareth? God, who works all things together for good, used Caesar Augustus' decree to have everyone under Roman rule go to their home cities to be registered. Mary, who was soon to give birth to Jesus, and Joseph, who was from the family of David, made the 92-mile trip, most likely on foot. It probably took them 4 or 5 days.

Q: Share an occasion when something happened at the worst time. (You got sick on your birthday. You broke your leg just before a dance recital. You had a spelling test and couldn't go out to play when your cousin came to town for a visit. Your keys got locked in the car when you were late for work.) Mary must have wondered about God's plan when she had to walk 92 miles to Bethlehem. (The Bible doesn't say she rode a donkey. Even if she rode, it couldn't have been very comfortable!)

Q: If you were Mary, do you think you would have grumbled and complained? Or do you think you would have trusted God because You saw His faithfulness in the past?

Q: How can we become people who trust God more when things happen at the worst time? (Remind ourselves that God works all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.)

Prayer: We praise You, Lord, because You are the Blessed Controller of all things. Thank You that we can put our trust in You. Help us to remember, when things do not go as planned, that You are working all things together for good. Remind us that life was hard, even for the mother of Jesus! Teach us to humbly accept Your will. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Written by
Margie Sanford

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Luke 2:8-12

8 In the same country there were shepherds in the fields. They were watching their flocks of sheep at night. 9 The angel of the Lord came to them. The shining-greatness of the Lord shone around them. They were very much afraid. 10 The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. See! I bring you good news of great joy which is for all people. 11 Today, One Who saves from the punishment of sin has been born in the city of David. He is Christ the Lord. 12 There will be something special for you to see. This is the way you will know Him. You will find the Baby with cloth around Him, lying in a place where cattle are fed."

Do you remember where our story left off? Mary and Joseph were on their 92 mile walk from Nazareth to Bethlehem. When Mary and Joseph got there it was a very busy town. There was no place for them to stay. But a kind-hearted inn-keeper let them use a stable where animals live to give birth to Jesus. Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords was born in a dirty, smelly barn.

While Jesus was born, a group of shepherds were busy doing what shepherds do. They were out in a field keeping watch over their sheep. It was just an ordinary night outside an ordinary town. That is, until an angel of the Lord broke through the ordinariness of the night with a great message: I bring you good news of great joy which is for all people. Today, One Who saves from the punishment of sin has been born in the city of David.

Q: Can you think of a time when you heard some great news? (Your favorite football team made it to the Super Bowl. Your family won an all-expense-paid vacation to Disney World.)

Q: Why do you think the angel's message is great news? (This message is for all people, not just the smart, the rich, the powerful, the pretty or the super religious. The message was given to the shepherds who were the unnoticed, powerless, the poor, the uneducated, the "unchurched" people of Bethlehem. The angel came to them because lowly shepherds were welcome in the Kingdom of God.)

Q: The angel said that the One Who saves from the punishment of sin has been born. How can baby Jesus save people from the punishment of sins? (Jesus would one day offer His life in exchange for our sinful lives when He died on the cross. When we put our trust in Jesus, we can be forgiven of our sins and live as a part of Jesus' forever family.)

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for the good news that the angel gave to the shepherds: that Your salvation is found in Jesus and that this news is for all people. Thank You that salvation is a free gift to those who put their trust in You. There's nothing that we can do to make You love us. Jesus has done it all! Teach us how to trust You and worship You with all our hearts. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Written by
Margie Sanford

Seeking Jesus

Luke 2:13-14

13 At once many angels from heaven were seen, along with the angel, giving thanks to God. They were saying, 14 “Greatness and honor to our God in the highest heaven and peace on earth among men who please Him.”

After the one angel delivered a message to the shepherds, many angels from heaven were seen. You would think that seeing and hearing one angel would be convincing enough. But on the night that Jesus was born, God opened up a window to see a multitude (that could be like a gazillion) angels who were rejoicing and singing out praises for what had just happened. Jesus was born. God became a human being so that people would be able know God in the same way that the angels know Him! How cool is that?

The angels sang a song that praised God. They sang, “*Greatness and honor to our God in the highest heaven!*” You see, the angels know that God deserves all our love and honor and praise. He is worth it!

Q: Have you ever seen something amazing in the sky? A beautiful sunset, a brilliant starry night, a colorful rainbow? How did you feel when you saw the beauty of God’s creation? (One response may be that it makes you worship God because the sky displays His glory.)

Q: The angels sang that God is great above everything and deserves our highest praise. **How can we show that He is the greatest of all?** (Some responses may be: going to church, singing praise songs, bringing food for the pantry, etc. Try to guide the discussion to a heart response: by loving Him, obeying Him, reading His Word, by trusting Him.)

Prayer: O Lord, You are so awesome and great. You deserve all our honor and praise. But we confess that we don’t always treat You this way. Forgive us, Lord, for living as if other people and things are above You. Help us to have hearts that give You our highest devotion and praise. Teach us to humbly obey Your Word so that all the world may know that You are Lord. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Seeking Jesus

Luke 2:15-18

15 The angels went from the shepherds back to heaven. The shepherds said to each other, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see what has happened. The Lord has told us about this." 16 They went fast and found Mary and Joseph. They found the Baby lying in a place where cattle are fed. 17 When they saw the Child, they told what the angel said about Him. 18 All who heard it were surprised at what the shepherds told them.

When my family lived outside of Chicago, there was a county airport not far from our home. Every summer, during Chicago's festival season, blimps would use the airport as a home base. Each morning and evening, they would fly over our house as they traveled back and forth to the city. Upon hearing the distinctive motor, someone in the house would say, "A blimp is coming!" Then everyone would stop what they were doing to run outside and see the colorful and unusual sight. We had to move fast because we didn't want to miss it!

The shepherds had seen many angels in the sky, singing and rejoicing over the Promised One's arrival. They had been given instructions: *the baby can be found lying in a place where cattle are fed and he will be wrapped in cloth.* Apparently, the shepherds went fast.

Q: Why do you think the shepherds left their sheep to go find Jesus? (They were curious if the angel's message was true. They wanted to see the Promised One who would save them from their sins. They wanted to worship Him just as the angels did.) After the shepherds found Jesus, they told Mary and Joseph all that they had seen and heard.

Q: How do you tell people about good news? (Phone, Facebook, Instagram)

Q: What kind of "good news" do you share? (a baby's birth, family vacations, fish caught, your team won, an engagement, a new job.)

Q: Have you ever felt excited to tell people about Jesus? Why or why not? (If people respond that they don't share about Jesus because they don't know what to say, assure them that if their heart's desire is to tell others, they can learn. That is the reason we study the Bible and go to Sunday School and church. The good news is not just for us. It is to be shared!)

Prayer: Lord, we confess to You that we are often more excited about posting pictures on Facebook and Instagram than we are about telling others about Jesus. Help us to become students of Your Word so that we will have exciting things to tell. Give us hearts that long to share Your good news. Thank You for Your indescribable gift to us through Your Son. In His Name we pray. Amen.

Written by
Margie Sanford

Seeking Jesus

Luke 2:19-20

19 But Mary hid all these words in her heart. She thought about them much. 20 The shepherds went back full of joy. They thanked God for all they had heard and seen. It happened as the angel had told them.

When the shepherds told Mary and Joseph all they had seen and heard, they were surprised. But Mary hid all these words in her heart.

Q: What do you think it means to hide words in your heart? (to remember them, to think about them, to believe them, to live by them, to memorize them)

Q: What are some words that you hide in your heart? (“Love your neighbor as yourself,” “Love God and love others,” “Trust in the Lord with all your heart,” “Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.”)

Psalm 119:11 says: Your word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against You.

Mary hid the words of the shepherds in her heart because it was truth from God.

Q: What should we be hiding in our hearts? Philippians 4:8 says Keep your minds thinking about whatever is true, whatever is respected, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever can be loved, and whatever is well thought of. If there is anything good and worth giving thanks for, think about these things.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for Your Word which is right, lovely, pure and true. Thank You that we can depend upon Your Word. Help us to hide Your Word in our hearts. Guard it so that we might not rebel against You. Teach us Your ways, for You are our God and we are Your people. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Seeking Jesus

Matthew 2:1-22

Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in the country of Judea. It was the time when Herod was king of that part of the country. Soon after Jesus was born, some wise men who learned things from stars came to Jerusalem from the East. 2 They asked, "Where is the King of the Jews Who has been born? We have seen His star in the East. We have come to worship Him."

Have your wise men been seeking the star that will lead them to Jesus over the last three weeks? Perhaps they have travelled all over your house as you have been seeking Jesus together. Here's some interesting information about the wise men:

They were most likely Zoroastrian priests from a region in northern Iraq (Kurdistan). That means they traveled over a thousand miles by camel to get to Bethlehem. Since they were well-versed in astrology, they believed that a very important event was about to happen: the King of the Jews was about to be born. They brought fine gifts of gold, spices and perfume for the king.

It might be surprising to learn that people, like the wise men, who live in countries where they have no Bible or no churches might be interested in learning about Jesus. Sometimes the only way that they know God is by looking at His creation.

Psalms 19: 1-4a tells us: 19 The heavens are telling of the greatness of God and the great open spaces above show the work of His hands. 2 Day to day they speak. And night to night they show much learning. 3 There is no speaking and no words where their voice is not heard. 4 Their sound has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

People around the world can know about God's goodness and power by looking into the sky. But they will never hear about Jesus until someone shares the good news that the Savior has come to rescue them from the debt of their sin. Only a perfect man, Jesus, could pay that price.

Paul tells us in his letter to the church at Rome (10:4) But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? The wise men travelled over 1,000 miles over rough terrain to see the King of the Jews. Most people who live where Jesus is not known cannot come to us.

Q: Who will go to tell these people about Jesus? Do you know anyone who is living in a place far away so that they can tell people about Jesus? (Share a missionary family's name.)

Q: Do you think that someday you might travel to another country to tell others about Jesus?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for displaying Your character through Your beautiful creation, especially the sky. Help us to remember that people in far away places who have never heard about Jesus are waiting for someone to come to them so that they might be saved. Remind us to pray for missionaries that we know who teach and preach about the good news of Jesus. Raise up many missionaries from our church and community who are willing to go. For the sake of Your Name and for Your glory, Amen.

Written by
Margie Sanford

Seeking Jesus

Matthew 2:3-6

3 King Herod heard this. He and all the people of Jerusalem were worried. 4 He called together all the religious leaders of the Jews and the teachers of the Law. Herod asked them where Christ was to be born. 5 They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea. The early preacher wrote, 6 'You, Bethlehem of Judah, are not the least of the leaders of Judah. Out of you will come a King Who will lead My people the Jews.'"

Have you ever been playing a game in your yard with your friends, like "Hide-and-Go-Seek" and all of a sudden, another friend comes by on his/her bike and says, "Hey, everybody, want to go ride bikes to the park?" So, all your friends hop on their bikes and ride away.

Q: How would you feel if this happened to you? (I'd feel angry. I'd feel like he/she ruined the game. I'd wish that my friend would never have come.)

This is how Herod felt when he learned from the wise men that a king was to be born. Then Herod called the religious leaders and they told him this news was true.

Q: Why was the news about Jesus good news for the shepherds but not good news for King Herod and some religious leaders? (The shepherds welcomed Jesus because they had been waiting for the Promised One who would show them how to live in peace. King Herod and some religious leaders didn't want Jesus because they wanted to remain in power and do things their way.)

Prayer: Lord God, we confess that there are times when we get angry because we want everything to go our way. In fact, sometimes we do not like to follow Your will. Forgive us, Lord, because we know that Your way is always good. Help us to have hearts like clay that You can mold and make into hearts that love You and Your will. May Your Holy Spirit show us when we are more like Herod than the shepherds. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Seeking Jesus

Matthew 2:7-8

7 Then Herod had a secret meeting with the men who learned things from stars. He asked them about what time the star had been seen. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and find the young Child. When you find Him, let me know. Then I can go and worship Him also."

Herod was an enemy of God. He worried about King Jesus becoming more important to the people than he was. Herod asked the wise men to return to him after they discovered where Jesus lived so he could harm him. He said he wanted to worship Jesus but that was a lie. The wise men were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod. So they returned a different way.

Remember when we talked earlier in the month about God working all things together for good? Well, even though there were people who hated Jesus, God had a purpose and nothing could stop God's plan from unfolding.

The prophet Isaiah (14:24) had some words to encourage us when we think that God's enemies are winning: **The Lord of All has promised, "It will happen just as I have planned it. As I have planned, so will it be."**

We can have peace in our hearts because God is always in control. He promised it!

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, that we have no reason to fear when we put our trust in You. You make all things work together for my good and for Your purpose. We praise You, Lord, that all your promises are true. Help us to remember this when we are afraid. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Seeking Jesus

Matthew 2:9-12

9 After the king had spoken, they went on their way. The star they had seen in the East went before them. It came and stopped over the place where the young Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were filled with much joy. 11 They went into the house and found the young Child with Mary, His mother. Then they got down before Him and worshiped Him. They opened their bags of riches and gave Him gifts of gold and perfume and spices. 12 Then God spoke to them in a dream. He told them not to go back to Herod. So they went to their own country by another road.

Over the past month, your family may have been hiding the star to symbolize the wise men's long journey. But the star was never the goal. Meeting Jesus was always the reason for the journey. In fact, everything you may have done this month to celebrate Christmas: decorating your house, buying and wrapping presents, participating in a school or church Christmas program, and reading this devotional guide, are ways that we can get to know Jesus. But they are not the goal.

When the wise men completed their journey, only one thing remained to do. Upon meeting Jesus, face to face, they bowed down (a form of respect) and worshiped Him. They brought valuable treasures as gifts to show honor and praise to Him.

Christina Rossetti captures what it means to worship Jesus in the last stanza of her poem, *In the Bleak Mid-Winter*:

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 I can I give him: give my heart.

Q: If Jesus came to visit your house, what would you want to give Him? (Give Him a hug? Give Him your bed to sleep on? Give Him all your money that you have saved? Give Him your heart?)

Prayer: Lord, we praise You because You are kind, gentle, wise, good, loving, faithful, patient, and compassionate. Teach us what it means to be Your fully devoted worshippers. Show us how to give our hearts to You. We love you, Lord Jesus. In Your Name we pray, Amen.

Written by
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Seeking Jesus

John 1:14

14 Christ became human flesh and lived among us. We saw His shining-greatness. This greatness is given only to a much-loved Son from His Father. He was full of loving-favor and truth. When we began to Seek Jesus at the start of December, we read some verses from the apostle John who was a close friend of Jesus.

Q: Do you have a close friend? Can you describe him/her?

Q: Can you remember anything special you have learned about Jesus through the past month?

--Isaiah said His name will be called Wonderful, Teacher, Powerful God, Father Who Lives Forever, Prince of Peace.

--Jeremiah said that Jesus would come from the family of King David and that He would do what was fair, and right, and good on the earth.

--The prophet Micah, said that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem.

--John said We saw His shining-greatness (other translations say We have seen His glory). John adds He was full of loving-favor and truth (other translations say full of grace and truth.)

--John also said: He gave the right and the power to become children of God to those who received Him. He gave this to those who put their trust in His name. (v.12)

On Christmas morning, Mary and Joseph saw Jesus for the first time. After listening to the angel chorus, the shepherds ran to see Jesus. And soon after Jesus' birth, the wise men saw Jesus. When Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and the wise men saw Jesus, they worshipped Him.

However, everyone was not ready to receive Him. Herod and some religious leaders weren't interested. But to those who put their trust in Him, to those who received Jesus, John says those people have the right to become children of God.

This Christmas, become a part of God's family. Let your heart prepare some room for Jesus. Let Him be your greatest gift.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for teaching us about the true meaning of Christmas. We praise You because You came to earth to save us from the power of sin. You made a way for us to belong to You. There is no One like Jesus. Let us worship Him with all of our lives. For His Name and for His Glory, Amen.

Written by
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