

WoH 467

The Christmas Story

(Luke 1:8-12)

Angel: "Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. This very day in King David's hometown a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. You will know who he is, because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay."

Tammy: Welcome to *Women of Hope*. It's that special time of celebration again. I'm Tammy... But what is it we *really* celebrate at Christmas? Who is this special baby? And why is he called 'a Savior'?

Carol: Hello, and I'm here to enjoy this special celebration with you today too. Yes...what is this 'good news, which will make everyone happy'? Today we want to share with you the real Christmas story. In fact we want to share it straight from God's word, the Bible, just as it was told to us by Dr Luke, the beloved doctor, who God chose to share this amazing story of his son Jesus.

Tammy: Are you comfortable and ready to listen? This is the beginning of the true story about Jesus. Some of our friends will read us the words from the book Luke wrote...

Luke: (Luke 1:1-4) Many people have tried to tell the story of what God has done among us. They wrote what we had been told by the ones who were there in the beginning and saw what happened. So I made a careful study of everything and then decided to write and tell you exactly what took place. Honorable Theophilus, I have done this to let you know the truth about what you have heard.

Tammy: I wonder why Dr Luke was writing to Theophilus?

Carol: Well, it seems that this man, who was possibly an honoured government official, became interested in what he had heard about Jesus. He had heard many unusual things...so he must have asked his friend, Dr Luke, to investigate and report back to him. And so Dr Luke's report continues...

Luke: When Herod was king of Judea, there was a priest by the name of Zechariah whose wife was Elizabeth. Both of them were good people and pleased the Lord God by obeying all that he had commanded. But they did not have children and they were already old.

One day, Zechariah's group of priests was on duty. He had been chosen to go into the Lord's temple that day to burn incense, while the people stood outside praying. All at once an angel from the Lord appeared to Zechariah at the right side of the altar. Zechariah was confused and afraid when he saw the angel. But the angel told him:

Angel: "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayers. Your wife Elizabeth will have a son, and you must name him John. His birth will make you very happy, and many people will be glad. Your son will be a great servant of the Lord, and the power of the Holy Spirit will be with him from the time he is born. John will lead many people in Israel to turn back to the Lord their God. And because of John, parents will be more thoughtful of their children. And people who now disobey God will begin to think as they ought to. That is how John will get people ready for the Lord."

Luke: Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know this is going to happen? My wife and I are both very old."

The angel answered:

Angel: "I am Gabriel, God's servant, and I was sent to tell you this good news."

Luke: When Zechariah's time of service in the temple was over, he went home.

Soon after that, his wife was expecting a baby, and for five months she did not leave the house. She said to herself:

Elizabeth: "What the Lord has done for me will keep people from looking down on me."

Luke: One month later God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee with a message for a young virgin named Mary. She was engaged to Joseph from the family of King David. The angel greeted Mary and said,

Angel: "You are truly blessed! The Lord is with you."

Luke: Mary was confused by the angel's words and wondered what they meant. Then the angel told Mary:

Angel: "Don't be afraid! God is pleased with you, and you will have a son. His name will be Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of God Most High. The Lord God will make him king, as his ancestor David was. He will rule the people of Israel forever, and his kingdom will never end."

Luke: Mary asked the angel,

Mary: "How can this happen? I am not married!"

Luke: The angel answered,

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

Luke: Mary said:

Mary: I am the Lord's servant! Let it happen as you have said.

Luke: And the angel left her.

Luke: A short time later Mary hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea. She went into Zechariah's home, where she greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, her baby moved within her.

The Holy Spirit came upon Elizabeth. Then in a loud voice she said to Mary:

Elizabeth: God has blessed you more than any other woman! He has also blessed the child you will have. Why should the mother of my Lord come to me? As soon as I heard your greeting, my baby became happy and moved within me. The Lord has blessed you because you believed that he will keep his promise.

Luke: Then Mary sang a song of praise:

Mary:

With all my heart
I praise the Lord,
and I am glad
because of God my Savior.
He cares for me,
his humble servant.
From now on,
all people will say
God has blessed me.
God All-Powerful has done
great things for me,

and his name is holy.
He always shows mercy
to everyone
who worships him...
He has not forgotten his promise
to be merciful.
The Lord made this promise
to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his family
forever!

Luke: Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months. Then she went back home.

Luke: When Elizabeth's son was born, her neighbors and relatives heard how kind the Lord had been to her, and they too were glad.
Eight days later they did for the child what the Law of Moses commands. They were going to name him Zechariah, after his father. But Elizabeth said, "No! His name is John."
Everyone wondered what this child would grow up to be. They knew that the Lord was with him.

Luke: The Holy Spirit came upon Zechariah, and he began to speak:

Zechariah: Praise the Lord,
the God of Israel!
He has come
to save his people.
Our God has given us
a mighty Savior from the family

of David his servant.
Long ago the Lord promised
by the words
of his holy prophets
to save us from our enemies...
God said he would be kind
to our people
and keep
his sacred promise.
He told our ancestor Abraham
that he would rescue us
from our enemies.
Then we could serve him
without fear,
by being holy and good
as long as we live.
You, my son, will be called
a prophet of God
in heaven above.
You will go ahead of the Lord,
to get everything ready
for him.
You will tell his people
that they can be saved
when their sins
are forgiven.
God's love and kindness
will shine upon us
like the sun that rises
in the sky. On us who live
in the dark shadow

of death
this light will shine
to guide us
into a life of peace.

Luke: As John grew up God's Spirit gave him great power. John lived in the desert until the time he was sent to the people of Israel.

Tammy: What wonderful promises Zechariah spoke about. These promises had been made so many years before by the prophets, and here before their eyes these prophecies were coming true – firstly with the birth of John...

Carol: ...and he was to make the way for the coming of the Messiah, the one who would save them and shine his light upon them...Jesus Christ.

Carol: Let's keep listening to God's word as Dr Luke continues to tell us this true story...

(from Luke 2:1-7)

Luke: About that time Emperor Augustus gave orders for the names of all the people to be listed in record books. Everyone had to go to their own hometown to be listed. So Joseph had to leave Nazareth in Galilee and go to Bethlehem in Judea. Long ago Bethlehem had been King David's hometown, and Joseph went there because he was from David's family.

Mary was engaged to Joseph and traveled with him to Bethlehem. She was soon going to have a baby, and while they were there, she gave birth to her first-born son. She dressed him in baby clothes and laid him on a bed of hay, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Luke: That night in the fields near Bethlehem some shepherds were guarding their sheep. All at once an angel came down to them from the Lord, and the

brightness of the Lord's glory flashed around them. The shepherds were frightened. But the angel said:

Angel: "Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. This very day in King David's hometown a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. You will know who he is, because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay."

Luke: Suddenly many other angels came down from heaven and joined in praising God. They said:

Angels: "Praise God in heaven!
Peace on earth to everyone
who pleases God."

Luke: After the angels had left and gone back to heaven, the shepherds said to each other:

Shepherds: "Let's go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about."

Luke: They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and they saw the baby lying on a bed of hay.

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

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

Eight days later Jesus' parents did for him what the Law of Moses commands. And they named him Jesus, just as the angel had told Mary when he promised she would have a baby.

Luke: The time came for Mary and Joseph to do what the Law of Moses says a mother is supposed to do after her baby is born. They took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem and presented him to the Lord...

At this time a man named Simeon was living in Jerusalem. Simeon was a good man. He loved God and was waiting for God to save the people of Israel. God's Spirit came to him and told him that he would not die until he had seen Christ the Lord.

When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple, the Spirit told Simeon to go into the temple. Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms and praised God,

Simeon: "Lord, I am your servant,
and now I can die in peace,
because you have kept
your promise to me.
With my own eyes I have seen
what you have done
to save your people,
and foreign nations
will also see this.
Your mighty power is a light
for *all* nations,
and it will bring honor
to your people Israel."

Luke: Jesus' parents were surprised at what Simeon had said. Then he blessed them and told Mary, "This child of yours will cause many people in Israel to fall and others to stand. The child will be like a warning sign. Many people will reject him, and you, Mary, will suffer as though you had been stabbed by a dagger. But all this will show what people are really thinking."

Luke: The prophet Anna was also there in the temple. She was very old. In her

youth she had been married for seven years, but her husband died. And now she was eighty-four years old. Night and day she served God in the temple by praying and often going without eating. At that time Anna came in and praised God. She spoke about the child Jesus to everyone who hoped to be set free.

Tammy: What a lot of people were involved in this story of the birth of Jesus. First, Mary's cousin Elizabeth, her husband, the priest Zechariah – and their son John. Both Elizabeth and Zechariah seemed to know all about the coming of the Savior, Jesus, didn't they?

Carol: Then there were the shepherds – just ordinary working men out in the fields – taking care of the sheep. What a shock, when the angel suddenly appeared to them and said: "Don't be afraid!" I wonder why he said that?

(Laughing) I think they would have been terrified. Wouldn't you?!

And then as they listened the angel went on to say: "I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. This very day in King David's hometown a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord."

Tammy: They may have heard long ago about the Messiah that was coming – this one that was going to save them. What a surprise that God chose to tell *them*, rather than the king, or the priests in the temple! ...And so that they would be sure to find him, the angel even went on to say: "You will know who he is, because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay." What?... Where?... Not in a palace?... Not in a beautifully hand made bed?...

Carol: You're right Tammy, those shepherds must have been amazed at what they heard. And then...when a whole crowd of angels appeared and began to shout:

"Praise God in heaven!

Peace on earth to everyone

who pleases God."...

Wouldn't you just love to have been there and heard their praises?!

Tammy: Well, when the angels were gone, the shepherds were not going to just sit there and talk about it – no, they hurried off straight away to find this baby that the angel had told them about. And sure enough, there he was just as the angel had said – with his mother, Mary, and Joseph and possibly some animals which would normally have been eating the hay that the baby, Jesus was sleeping on. I wonder what they did when they got there? What would you do?

Carol: We sometimes see what we call 'nativity scenes' where the shepherds are kneeling down before the baby Jesus. That's probably what they did – and they would most likely have praised God for his son, Jesus.

Tammy: I think Dr Luke must have talked to many people to be sure that he told this story correctly. He may have even talked to Mary, Jesus' mother too and heard from her exactly what happened. So he was able to report to Honorable Theophilus that what he had heard was indeed true.

Carol: And here's the end of this part of the story that he wrote for Theophilus...

Luke: After Joseph and Mary had done everything that the Law of the Lord commands, they returned home to Nazareth in Galilee. The child Jesus grew. He became strong and wise, and God blessed him.

Carol: We've talked many times about Jesus on *Women of Hope* haven't we! We have often talked about how he gave his life for each one of us. Do you remember what the prophet Simeon said to Mary in the temple? He said: 'Many people will reject him, and you, Mary, will suffer as though you had been stabbed by a dagger.'

Tammy: And that's just what happened when Mary watched her son, Jesus, as a grown man, nailed to a cross. He took the punishment for the wrong things we have done. That's why Simeon, the prophet said: 'With my own eyes I have seen what you have done to save your people, and foreign nations will also see this. Your mighty power is a light for *all* nations.'...

Carol: ...That includes me...and you, no matter who you are, where you live, or what you have done. Let's finish today by praising God for his son Jesus...

Father God, thank you for sending your son Jesus to this world as a baby. We thank you that we can celebrate his birth this Christmas time. We thank you that when he grew up he showed such love to those around him. And most of all we thank you that he came to be our Savior – to die on the cross so that we could have new life. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen

Tammy: We hope you've enjoyed hearing the story of Jesus today as much as we've enjoyed listening to it again. We would love to hear from you. You can contact us at...

Bye...God bless you

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