

The Story of Jesus

Many years ago in a city called Nazareth in the land of Palestine there lived a young woman named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. One day an angel came to her and told her, "You are going to have a baby boy."

"But how could that be?" Mary asked. "I'm not married yet." The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will plant a seed in your body, and the baby that will be born will be called the Son of God. He will be great in God's sight, and will save His people from their sins."

After this Mary was an expectant mother. Joseph at first thought that she had been unfaithful to him, and was going to break the engagement, but an angel told him about the baby, so he and Mary were married as they had planned. Some months afterwards the Roman emperor ordered a count of all his subjects, and Joseph took his wife to Bethlehem, where their ancestors had lived, in order to be registered there. When they arrived, the inn was full, but the kind-hearted inn-keeper allowed them to stay in the stable, and there the baby was born and named Jesus.

In the country nearby some shepherds were watching their sheep when suddenly an angel stood beside them in shining garments. The shepherds were frightened, but the angel said, "Don't be afraid, I have good news for you. A Savior is born tonight in Bethlehem." Then the sky was filled with crowds of angels saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and goodwill toward men." When the angels had gone, the shepherds went to Bethlehem and saw the baby. Later some wise men from a far eastern country followed a star till they found Him.

The boy Jesus grew up like other children. He obeyed His parents and learned the trade of a carpenter as His father was. He had four brothers, and when He was about thirty years of age and they were able to take care of His mother, who by now was a widow, He left home and traveled to the Jordan River in the country of Judea, where a man named John had been preaching, telling men to turn away from their sins and baptizing them. Jesus came to John and asked to be baptized. Although John did not feel worthy to baptize Him, when Jesus insisted, he did, and as soon as it was done, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove came down from Heaven and rested on Jesus, and a voice said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

After this Jesus spent forty days fasting in the desert, where Satan tempted Him, but He did not yield to his temptations. Then He went back to Galilee and began to preach and to call helpers whom He called apostles, and whom He taught about His Heavenly Father. Four of these helpers were fishermen, two brothers named Peter and Andrew, and two other brothers named James and John. One, Matthew, had been a tax collector. The others were Thomas, Philip, Nathanael, Little James, Thaddeus, Simon the Canaanite, and Judas, who finally betrayed Jesus. These twelve helpers went with Him everywhere, learning from Jesus how to carry on His work after He was gone.

As we have already said, Jesus was the Son of God. He knew that He had been born to tell the world about God's love, and how God, Who had made people in the beginning, wanted them to live forever

with Him in Heaven. But people had sinned, and no sinner can ever come to God unless his sins are forgiven and his sinful nature is changed. So Jesus and His helpers began traveling around the country of Galilee, telling about the plan of salvation that He had come to carry out. He preached in the synagogues, or churches, but more often out in the country, where great crowds came to hear Him.

Jesus not only preached about God's love, but He also cured sick people. One day He went with His helpers to the home of Peter, who was one of them. Peter's wife's mother was sick with a fever. When Jesus heard about it, He took her by the hand and lifted her up, and at once the fever left her. She got out of bed and helped to prepare dinner.

On another occasion when Jesus was teaching in a house in Galilee, four men came carrying a man who was paralyzed. There was such a great crowd that they could not get into the house, so they carried the man up an outside stairway to the roof, made a hole in it, and let the man down in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." There were religious men called scribes sitting there and they were thinking, "This man is pretending to be God, for only God can forgive sins." But Jesus, who knew what they were thinking, said to them, "If I can tell this man to get up and walk, you will have to agree that I can forgive his sins." Then He said to the man, "Get up, roll up your mattress, and go home." At once the man got up, completely well. The people were all astonished and praised God.

In the land of Israel where Jesus lived, God had told the people not to work on the seventh day of each week, which they called the Sabbath. But the religious leaders had added many rules of their own, so that the Sabbath day, which God meant to be a day of rest and refreshment, had become a burden. The religious leaders were anxious to find fault with Jesus, so one day when He was in their synagogue, and a man was there with a crippled hand, they watched Him to see whether He would heal him. But Jesus knew their thoughts, and asked them, "If one of you has a sheep that has fallen into a pit on the Sabbath day, will you not help it out? So would it be wrong to tell this man that he is cured?" Then He told the man to reach out with his hand, and it was cured. But the religious leaders, called Pharisees, were very angry.

One day Jesus and His helpers crossed the Sea of Galilee and came to a country called Gadara. Here a man met them who was under the power of evil spirits. He would tear off his clothes, cut himself with stones, and cry out, so that people were afraid to go that way. When Jesus came near, He told the evil spirits to leave. But they begged Him not to send them to the place of torment. There was a herd of about two thousand hogs pasturing nearby, and the spirits begged to be allowed to go into them. Jesus gave them permission, and the whole herd ran into the sea and were drowned. The men who were tending them ran and told it in the city, the people came out, and when they saw the man who had been mad sitting beside Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, they were afraid, and asked Jesus to leave. The man who was cured wanted to go with Him, but Jesus told Him to go back to his friends and tell them what God had done for him. Then He crossed back to the other side of the sea.

When He came to shore again, the man in charge of the local synagogue, whose name was Jairus, came running and begged Him to come to his home, where his twelve year old daughter lay dying. Jesus at

once went with him, but the crowd was so great that they made slow progress. All at once Jesus stopped and asked, "Who touched me?" The disciples pointed out that people were crowding against Him on every side, but He insisted that someone had touched Him for a special reason. Then a woman came out from the crowd behind Jesus and told Him that she had been sick for twelve years and that no doctor could help her, but that when she had touched the coat of Jesus she had been made well at once. Jesus told her that because of her faith in Him she had been healed.

But now a messenger came from the home of Jairus telling him that his daughter was dead. "It's too late now," the messenger said, "It's no use to trouble the Teacher any longer." But Jesus heard the message and said to Jairus, "Don't worry, just trust me, and everything will be all right." They went on to the home, where people had already come to mourn and comfort the parents. Jesus took Peter, James, and John and the parents of the girl into the room where she lay. He took her hand, and said, "Get up, little girl." The girl opened her eyes, and when she saw Jesus, she sat up. Jesus gave her back to her parents, and told them to give her something to eat, for now that she was well, she was hungry.

So all through that summer Jesus continued to teach and heal in Galilee. He taught many lessons in stories. He told about a sower who sowed his seed. Some fell on the path beside the fields, and the birds ate it up. Some fell on rocky soil; it sprouted, but because the soil was not deep, it soon withered. Others fell among weeds, which choked it. But some fell on good soil and brought a bountiful harvest. Jesus explained the story to His disciples. The seed is the message of salvation. The path is those whose hearts are hard and will not receive the message. The rocky soil is those who receive it, but soon become discouraged and give up. The weedy soil is those who receive the message, but allow it to be crowded out by other things. But the good soil is those who receive it and obey it, remain faithful Christians all their lives, and spend eternity in Heaven.

The summer months passed, and winter approached. The crowds could no longer follow Jesus in the open country, and He and His helpers needed shelter. So He sent them out in pairs; He gave them power to heal the sick and cast out the evil spirits. He told them to go from town to town wherever there was someone who would take them in and let them stay till they went to the next town. So they went over the country healing the sick and telling of God's love and care.

After they had all gone, Jesus traveled south to Jerusalem, the capital city of Judea. Here, on the Sabbath day, He found a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years, and He healed him. The Pharisees found fault because He had done it on the Sabbath day, although Jesus had done no work, He had only spoken the word and the man was well. But Jesus told them, "My father is a worker, and I am too." This made the Pharisees very angry, for Jesus had not only broken their Sabbath, but had said that God was His Father, which would have been a very wicked thing to say if it had not been true. But the Pharisees did not believe that Jesus was God's Son, even though He had done many things that only God could do, so they determined to kill Him.

While Jesus was at Jerusalem, He sometimes stayed at a home in the nearby village of Bethany where there lived a man named Lazarus with his two sisters, Martha and Mary. One day when Jesus came for supper Martha was anxious to have a good meal, but her sister Mary sat down and listened to Jesus.

Martha soon came and complained, saying, "Teacher, don't You think my sister should help me get supper?" But Jesus said, "Martha, Martha, you are worried about a lot of things, but Mary has chosen the one thing that is important, that is, to learn about the way of salvation."

Jesus soon went back to Galilee and preached from town to town as His disciples were doing. When spring came again, they came together in a place apart and told Jesus what they had done. Jesus would have liked to rest with them for awhile, but people had found out where they were, and a great crowd gathered. Jesus pitied them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and He taught them and healed the sick ones among them. When the evening came on, Jesus told his disciples, "The people are hungry, we ought to give them something to eat." The disciples said, "Where could we get food for all these people out here in the wilderness?" But a little boy had five rolls and two fishes that his mother had packed for his lunch, and he had offered it to Jesus. So Jesus told the crowds to sit down on the grass, then He thanked God for the food and began breaking the rolls and fishes and giving them to the disciples to give to the people. The food multiplied in His hands until all had had enough, and there were twelve baskets full left over.

That night still another miracle took place. The crowds did not want to leave Jesus, so He told His disciples to get into a fishing boat and sail away. After they had gone, Jesus slipped away from the crowd and went up into a mountain to pray. Later in the night He followed them, walking on the water. A storm had come up, and the disciples were rowing hard and making little progress when Jesus came up to them, walking on the water. The disciples were afraid, for they thought they were seeing a ghost. But Jesus called to them, "Don't be afraid, it is I." He got into the boat, and at once the storm stopped. Then the disciples were amazed, and were sure that Jesus had come from God.

But now the Pharisees at Jerusalem, who had determined to get rid of Jesus, sent some of their number to Galilee to watch Him, find fault with Him, and try to turn the people away from Him. Their opposition became so bitter that Jesus left Galilee and went into the neighboring country of Syria. He tried to avoid appearing in public, but a woman whose daughter was tormented by a wicked spirit heard about Him, and came to beg Him to help her. Jesus at first refused. The Jews regarded the heathen people as dogs, and Jesus, referring to this, said to her, "It isn't right to give the children's food to dogs." The woman answered, "True, Lord, but the dogs still get the children's crumbs." Jesus, moved by her persistent faith, healed her daughter and sent her away rejoicing.

After a time Jesus went back again into Galilee, but stayed on the east side of the Jordan River, where the Pharisees did not find Him. Most of the summer He spent alone with His disciples, teaching them the principles of the church that they were to carry on after He had left them. On one occasion He asked them, "Who do people say that I am?" They answered, "Some say You are Elijah, or Jeremiah, or some other prophet." Then He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter, who usually spoke first, answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said, "I'm glad you believe this, Peter, for my Heavenly Father has shown it to you." Then He told them that the Jews at Jerusalem would reject Him and kill Him, but on the third day He would rise again.

When winter approached again, Jesus began a last trip to Jerusalem, traveling from place to place and teaching as He went. He gave many lessons in stories. One was called "The Good Samaritan." Someone had asked Him what to do to gain eternal life, and Jesus had said, "Love God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself." The man then asked, "Who is my neighbor?" So Jesus told the story of a Jew who was beaten and robbed, and left lying beside the road. A priest came by, saw him, and went on. A Levite, a religious helper, came by and went on. Then a Samaritan, to whom the Jews were enemies, came by, saw the man, and helped him to an inn, where he paid the innkeeper to take care of him. Then Jesus asked, "Which one was the neighbor?" The man answered, "The one who helped him." Jesus said, "You do the same."

Another story is called "The Prodigal Son." It was about a man who had two sons. The younger son asked the father to give him his share of his property, which the father did. Then the son took his money into a far country, where he spent it all in living high. But when his money was gone, he took a job feeding hogs, and was very poor and hungry. At last he said to himself, "The hired servants in my father's house have plenty to eat, while I am starving. I will go back to my father; I will tell him I have done wrong, and ask him to take me back as a hired man." So he went back to his father. But his father welcomed him home and freely forgave him.

While Jesus was still traveling toward Jerusalem, His friend Lazarus in Bethany became sick. His sisters sent a message to Jesus, but He waited for two days before He started to their home, and in the meantime Lazarus died and was buried. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she came to meet Him, and said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Jesus said, "Your brother shall rise again." Martha answered, "I know that he will rise in the resurrection at the Judgment day." Jesus answered, "I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she answered, "I believe that You are God's Son." Jesus then asked for Mary, and when she had come, He went with the sisters to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone covered its entrance. Many of the neighbors and friends from Bethany and Jerusalem had come to comfort the sisters, and went along to the grave. Jesus asked them to take the stone from the entrance. Martha told Him that the body had already begun to decay, but Jesus insisted, and the neighbors pulled back the stone. Then Jesus, looking up to heaven, thanked God for hearing Him. And then He called, "Lazarus, come out!" And Lazarus came to the doorway, wrapped in graveclothes. Jesus told the people to unbind him and set him free, and he was alive and well again.

Now the time was approaching for the great feast of the Jewish people, called the Passover. People from all over the country came to Jerusalem to celebrate it. On the Sunday morning before the feast, Jesus sent two of His disciples to borrow a donkey, and on it He rode into Jerusalem. It was a march of triumph, for the people from Galilee, who were coming to the feast, threw branches of trees in the road and shouted, "This is the coming King of Israel." Jesus went into the temple; there He found that a market had been set up right in the building where animals were sold for sacrifices and money was exchanged. Jesus drove them all out, and ordered that God's house should be used only for worship. The chief priests were very angry, for they had profited from the market, yet they were afraid to do anything to Jesus because they knew that the market in the temple was wrong. They tried to trap Jesus with hard questions, but He answered them all so wisely that the people rejoiced, and the chief priests

were ashamed. They wanted to kill Him, but they were afraid to arrest Him in the daytime for fear of the people, and they could not find Him at night, for He always left the city in the evening. But one night, one of the disciples of Jesus, named Judas, came to them and offered to tell them where they could find Jesus. They were well pleased and agreed to give him thirty silver coins.

Jesus, because He was God's Son, knew all about these things. On the night before the Passover He gathered His disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem. They had been disputing about who would be greatest, but He gave them an example of humbleness and loving service by washing their feet. Then they had supper together, and as they ate, He told them that one of them was going to betray Him. He sent Judas on an errand, and as soon as he had gone he went to the chief priests and told them he was ready to show them where Jesus would be. After he had left, Jesus took bread, broke it, and gave it to the disciples. He said, "This bread is my body, which is broken for you, do this in remembrance of me." He also gave them a cup to share, telling them, "This cup is my blood, do this also in remembrance of me." Then He comforted them, and took them with Him out to the Mountain of Olives, where He often spent the nights. There He left them and went alone to pray to His Heavenly Father, praying for strength to do His Father's will. He was there when Judas brought a band of men from the chief priests, who took Jesus, bound Him, and took Him to their council, where they condemned Him to death.

In the morning they took Him before the Roman governor, whose approval was necessary before they could put Him to death. The governor tried to set Him free, but they urged Pilate to order Jesus to be nailed to a cross. Thus Jesus died, but when He died, He paid the penalty for the sins of everyone in the whole world. Everyone who accepts Him as Savior is freed from the punishment that he deserves, because Jesus paid it.

But this was not the end of the story. Jesus was buried and His tomb sealed, but on the third day He rose again. He showed Himself to His followers, and talked with them from time to time for forty days. Then He went back to Heaven, and is there preparing a home for all those who accept and obey Him.

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BIBLE HELPS

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