

The Nativity Story

A Visit by an Angel

Mary lived in the village of Nazareth, halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea. Not much went on in Nazareth, for it was small and unimportant, but Mary was happy and excited, for she was engaged to be married to Joseph, a carpenter who could trace his family back to King David.

Now, one day, Mary was quietly going about her chores when suddenly she was aware of a bright light shining before her, and she looked up to see an angel of God, all in white. She gasped in shock—what could this mean? But the angel smiled at her and said gently, “Mary, don’t be afraid. God loves you and has blessed you. He has chosen you for a very special honor. You will give birth to a baby boy, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be called the Son of God, and his kingdom will never end!”

Mary was filled with wonder. “How can this be?” she asked softly. “I’m not even married!”

“Nothing is impossible for God,” replied the angel. “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and your child will be God’s own Son.”

Mary could hardly believe what she was hearing, but she trusted God with all her heart. If he said it would happen, it would happen.

“I am God’s servant,” she said. “I’ll do whatever God wants me to.”

God spoke to Joseph in a dream and explained that Mary had not been unfaithful to him and that the child would be very special indeed. Joseph married Mary straight away and took good care of her.



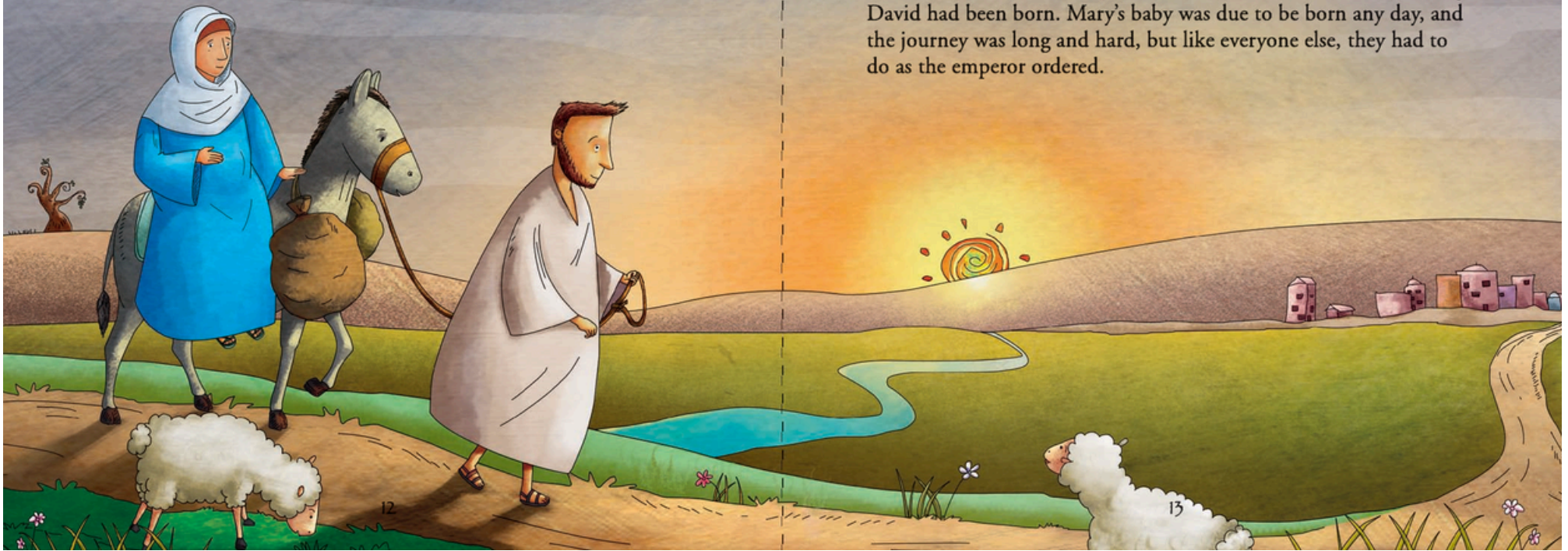
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An Important Journey

Soon it would be time for Mary to have her baby. She probably wanted to be nice and comfortable in her own home, with all her own things around her and her family nearby to help out. But that wasn't how it worked out.

You see, at exactly this time, the emperor of Rome decided to order a census. The emperor was a very powerful man, and he ruled over many, many lands. He wanted to keep track of every single person in all the lands that he ruled over. He wanted to make sure that everyone paid their taxes! And so all the people throughout the lands ruled by Rome had to go to their hometown to be counted.

It so happened that Joseph's family was descended from King David, and so he and Mary had to travel to Bethlehem, where King David had been born. Mary's baby was due to be born any day, and the journey was long and hard, but like everyone else, they had to do as the emperor ordered.



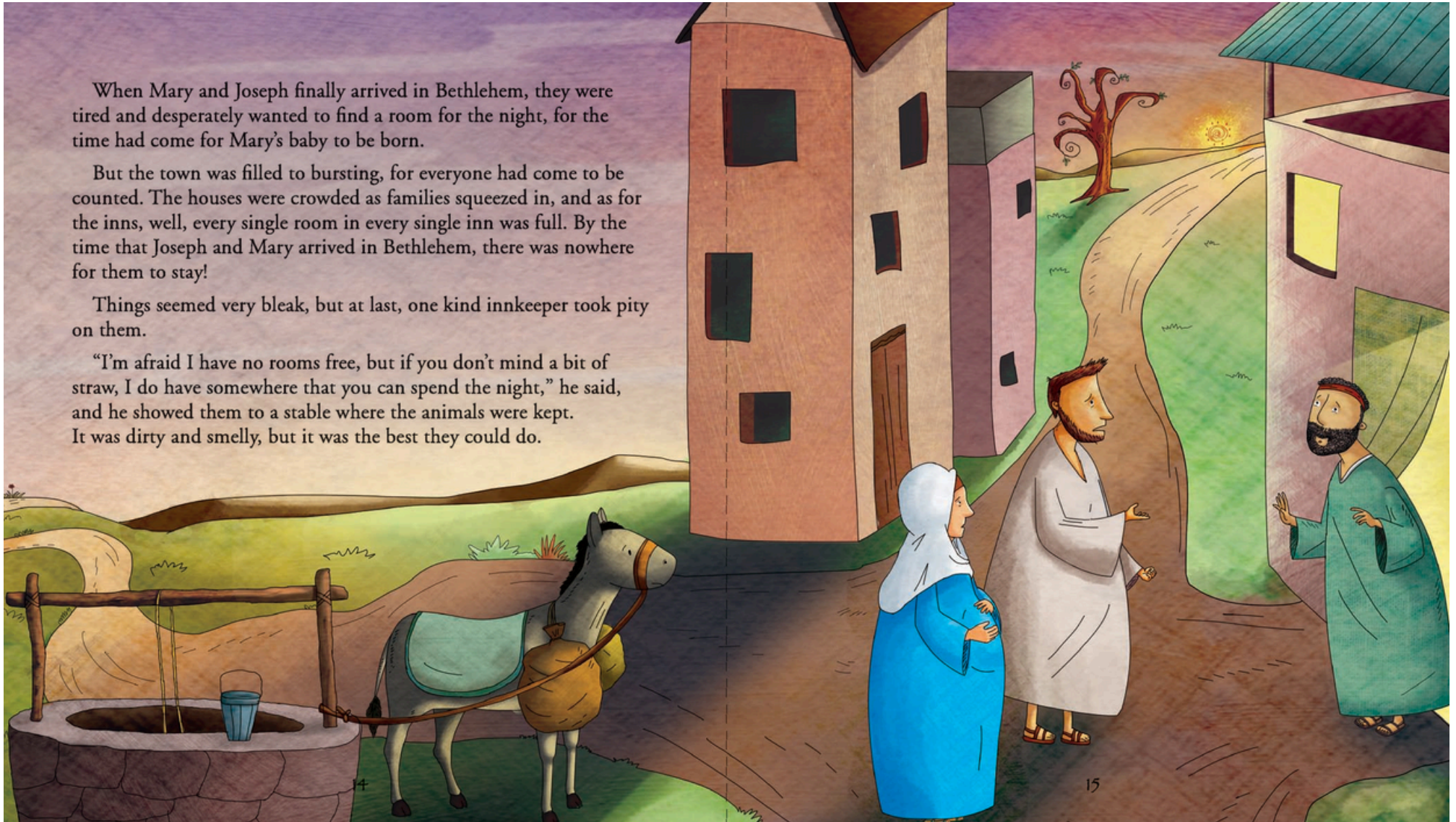
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When Mary and Joseph finally arrived in Bethlehem, they were tired and desperately wanted to find a room for the night, for the time had come for Mary's baby to be born.

But the town was filled to bursting, for everyone had come to be counted. The houses were crowded as families squeezed in, and as for the inns, well, every single room in every single inn was full. By the time that Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem, there was nowhere for them to stay!

Things seemed very bleak, but at last, one kind innkeeper took pity on them.

"I'm afraid I have no rooms free, but if you don't mind a bit of straw, I do have somewhere that you can spend the night," he said, and he showed them to a stable where the animals were kept. It was dirty and smelly, but it was the best they could do.



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That night, Mary's baby was born. She wrapped him in strips of cloth to keep him warm and laid him gently on clean straw in a manger—one of the troughs that the animals used for feeding. Mary and Joseph looked down upon their son with joy, and they named him Jesus, just as the angel had told them to.

And so, one of the prophecies of the Old Testament was fulfilled, for over seven hundred years before this, the prophet Isaiah had foretold that one day God would send a sign: "A young virgin will fall pregnant and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel."

You see, Immanuel means "God is with us," and that is exactly what had happened—God had come to live with us on earth. Jesus was Immanuel!



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The Very First Visitors

That same night, on a hillside overlooking Bethlehem, some shepherds were watching over their sheep. Apart from keeping an eye out for wild animals, there wasn't much to do, so they sat around a fire sharing stories.

All of a sudden, the dark night sky was ablaze with light, and the shepherds fell to the ground in fright as an angel of the Lord appeared in the sky above them.

"Don't be afraid," the angel said to them gently, just as he had reassured Mary so many months ago. "I am here to bring you good news—the best news! Today a very special baby has been born in King David's town—he is Christ, the Messiah, God's own Son! Go and see for yourselves. You will find him lying in a manger in a stable."

And with these words the sky was filled with more angels, all singing a wonderful, beautiful song praising God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth and good will to all men!"

And then, as swiftly as they had come, the angels disappeared.



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from *The Jesus Bible for Kids*

In the silence that followed, the shepherds looked at one another in amazement. Had that really just happened? Had a host of shining angels just appeared to them, a bunch of dirty, raggedy shepherds?

But they didn't waste much time thinking about "why?" for they were far too busy racing down to the town and searching for the stable where they would find the special baby. And when they did find Mary and Joseph, and little Jesus lying in the manger just as they had been told, their hearts exploded with joy and gratitude, and they rushed off to tell everyone they could find about the wonderful news.



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Following a Star

In a distant land far to the east, three wise men had been studying the stars. These men were clever and respected and wealthy—you might even have mistaken them for kings if you had seen them in all their finery!

Anyway, one night they discovered a bright new star shining in the skies. They knew that it meant something very special—they knew that it was a sign that a great king had been born—and so they prepared for a long journey, packed up their things, and followed the star all the way to Jerusalem.

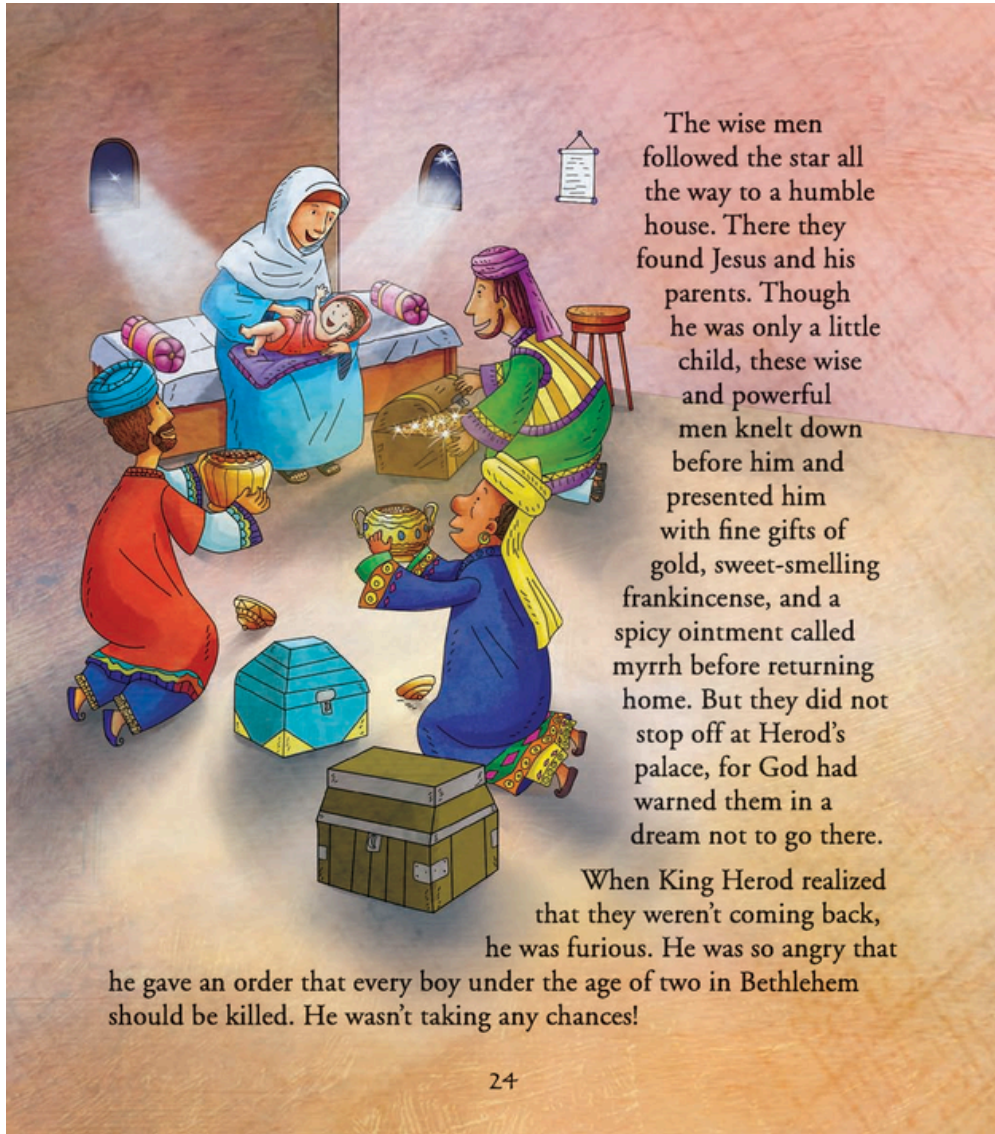


In Jerusalem they made their way to the court of Herod the Great (who wasn't really so great, for he was actually rather cruel and wicked), who was the king of Judea (although really he had to do what the Roman emperor told him to do). There they asked if he could show them the way to the baby who would be the king of the Jews.

Herod was horrified! He was king—he didn't want another king around! His advisors told him of a prophecy that the new king would be born in the city of King David, in Bethlehem.

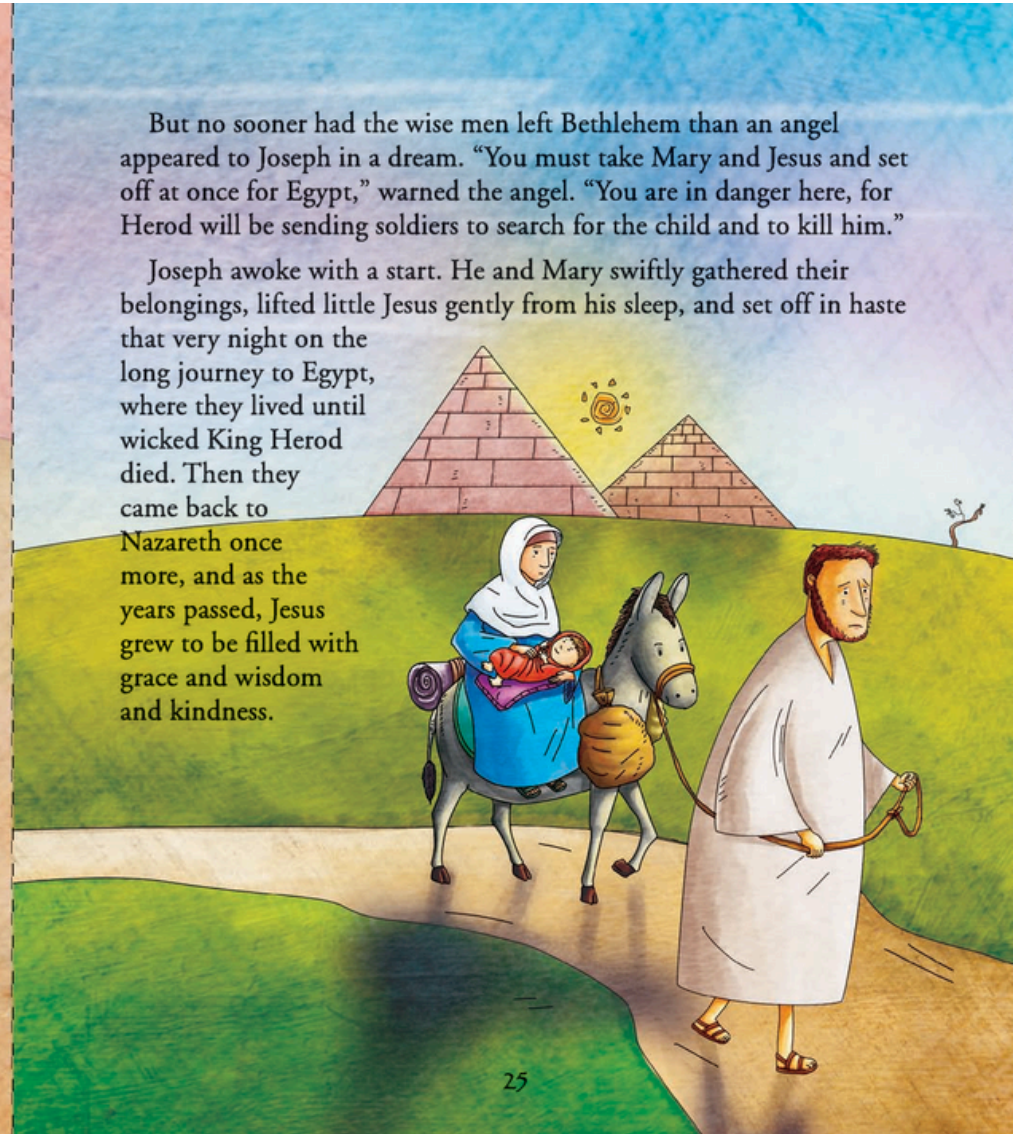
Then the cunning king sent the wise men to Bethlehem, saying, "Once you have found him, come back and tell me where he is so that I can visit him too!" He didn't say what sort of visit he wanted to pay him!

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The wise men followed the star all the way to a humble house. There they found Jesus and his parents. Though he was only a little child, these wise and powerful men knelt down before him and presented him with fine gifts of gold, sweet-smelling frankincense, and a spicy ointment called myrrh before returning home. But they did not stop off at Herod's palace, for God had warned them in a dream not to go there.

When King Herod realized that they weren't coming back, he was furious. He was so angry that he gave an order that every boy under the age of two in Bethlehem should be killed. He wasn't taking any chances!



But no sooner had the wise men left Bethlehem than an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. "You must take Mary and Jesus and set off at once for Egypt," warned the angel. "You are in danger here, for Herod will be sending soldiers to search for the child and to kill him."

Joseph awoke with a start. He and Mary swiftly gathered their belongings, lifted little Jesus gently from his sleep, and set off in haste that very night on the long journey to Egypt, where they lived until wicked King Herod died. Then they came back to Nazareth once more, and as the years passed, Jesus grew to be filled with grace and wisdom and kindness.