

JESUS?

WHO IS HE?

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This book is an abbreviation of the Bible,
the foundation of the best of our country, culture,
and values of respect and love.

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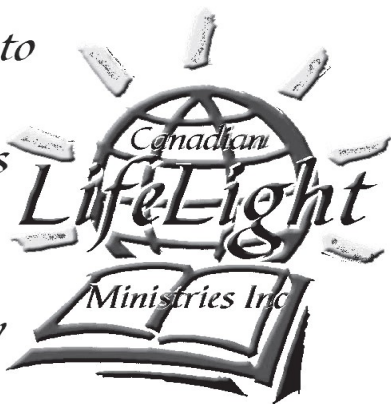


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THE BEGINNING

The life of Jesus Christ did not end on the cross. In the same way, it did not begin in a manger in the little town of Bethlehem. It would be difficult to answer the question of “Who Is Jesus?”, without giving at least two small chapters worth of background. There is no better place to start any story other than the beginning.

JESUS IS THE WORD

In the beginning, the Word was already there. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

All things were made through him. Nothing that has been made was made without him. Life was in him, and that life was the light for all people. The light shines in the darkness.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth didn't have any shape. And it was empty. God said, “Let there be light.” God called the light “day”, and the darkness “night.”

God said, “Let there be a huge space between the waters. God called the huge space “sky.”

God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered into one place. Let dry ground appear.” God called the dry ground “land”, and the gathered waters “seas.”

Then God said, “Let the land produce plants with their own seeds, and trees that grow fruit.”

God said, “Let there be lights in the huge space of the sky.” God made two great lights. He made the larger light to rule over the day and the smaller light to rule over the night.

God said, “Let the seas be filled with living things. Let birds fly above the earth.” God blessed them. He said,

“Have little ones so that there will be many of you.” God said, “Let the land produce every kind of living creature.” God made every kind of wild animal, livestock, and every kind of creature that moves along the ground. Then God said, “Let us make human beings so that they are like us. Let them rule over the fish, birds, livestock, wild animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created human beings in his own likeness. He created them as male and female. God blessed them. He said to them, “Have children so that there will be many of you.” God saw everything he had made. And it was very good.

ADAM AND EVE

The Lord God had planted a garden in the east in Eden. There were two trees in the middle of the garden. He said, “You may eat fruit from any tree in the garden. But you must not eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

The serpent was more clever than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. The serpent said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat fruit from any tree in the garden’?”

The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden. But God did say, ‘You must not eat the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden.’”

The serpent said to the woman, “God knows that when you eat fruit from that tree, you will know things you have never known before. Like God, you will be able to tell the difference between good and evil.” So she took some of the fruit and ate it. She also gave some to her husband. And he ate it. Then both of them knew things they had never known before.

So the Lord God spoke to the serpent. He said, “I am putting a curse on you. I will put hatred between you and the woman. Your children and her children will be ene-

mies. Her son will crush your head. And you will crush his heel.”

So the Lord God drove the man out of the Garden of Eden. He sent the man to farm the ground he had been made from. The Lord God drove him out and then placed angels on the east side of the garden. He also placed there a flaming sword that flashed back and forth. The angels and the sword guarded the way to the tree of life.

In this story, the serpent is Satan. The woman's son is Jesus. "You will crush his heel" refers to the crucifixion...but "Her son will crush your head" is the triumph that Jesus will have over the evil of this world.

NOAH AND THE FLOOD

Nine generations later, the earth was very sinful in God's eyes. So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to everyone. They have filled the earth with their harmful acts. I am certainly going to destroy them and the earth. So make yourself an ark out of cypress wood. I am going to bring a flood on the earth. It will destroy all life under the sky."

Then the Lord said to Noah, "Go into the ark with your whole family. I know that you are a godly man among the people of today. Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth." For 40 days the flood kept coming on the earth. But God showed concern for Noah. So God sent a wind to sweep over the earth. And the waters began to go down. Then God said to Noah, "Come out of the ark. Bring your wife and your sons and their wives with you. Bring out every kind of living thing that is with you. Then they can multiply on the earth. They can have little ones and the number of them can increase. I will never destroy all living things again."

Then God blessed Noah and his sons. He said to them, "Have children so that there are many of you. Fill the earth. Here is the sign of the covenant I am making. I have put my rainbow in the clouds. When the rainbow appears in

the clouds, I will see it. I will remember that my covenant will last forever.”

This story represents the new beginnings that each of us can have when Jesus washes away our sins through salvation.

ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

Nine generations later, Terah became the father of Abram. Abram got married. The name of Abram’s wife was Sarai. But Sarai wasn’t able to have children.

When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to him. He said, “I am the Mighty God. Walk faithfully with me. Live in a way that pleases me. I will greatly increase the number of your children after you. You will not be called Abram anymore. Your name will be Abraham, because I have made you a father of many nations. Do not continue to call your wife by the name Sarai. Her name will be Sarah. I will give her my blessing. You can be sure that I will give you a son by her.”

The Lord was gracious to Sarah, just as he had said he would be. Sarah became pregnant. She had a son by Abraham when he was old. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son.

Some time later God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, “Abraham! Take Isaac. Go to Moriah. Give him to me there as a burnt offering. Sacrifice him on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”

Early the next morning Abraham got up. He put a saddle on his donkey. He took his son Isaac with him. He cut enough wood for the burnt offering. Then he started out for the place God had told him about.

On the third day Abraham looked up. He saw the place a long way off. Abraham put the wood for the burnt offering on his son Isaac. He himself carried the fire and the knife. The two of them walked on together.

They reached the place God had told Abraham about.

There Abraham built an altar. He arranged the wood on it. He tied up his son Isaac. He placed him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand. He took the knife to kill his son.

But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven. He said, "Abraham! Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you have respect for God. You have not held back from me your only son."

Abraham looked up. There in a bush he saw a ram. It was caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram. He sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

Not only is this story about God testing the faith of Abraham, it is also a foreshadowing of God's own promise to offer his only son, Jesus Christ as a sacrificial lamb intended to save the world from sin.

Abraham lived a total of 175 years. He took his last breath and died when he was very old. He was buried with his wife Sarah. After Abraham died, God blessed his son Isaac.

Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah. She wasn't able to have children. So Isaac prayed to the Lord for her. And the Lord answered his prayer. His wife Rebekah became pregnant with twins.

The time came for Rebekah to have her babies. The first one to come out was red. His whole body was covered with hair. So they named him Esau. Then his brother came out. His hand was holding onto Esau's heel. So he was named Jacob. Isaac was 60 years old when Rebekah had them. Jacob went to Padan Aram. He went to live with Laban, Rebekah's brother. There he married two of Laban's daughters, Leah and Rachel. Jacob had twelve sons. The second youngest was named Joseph.

After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again. And God blessed him. God said to him, "Your name is Jacob. But you will not be called Jacob anymore. Your name will be Israel." So he named him Israel.

Jacob came home to his father Isaac. Isaac lived 180 years. Then he took his last breath and died. His sons Esau and Jacob buried his body.

JOSEPH IS SOLD BY HIS BROTHERS

Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons. Joseph had been born to him when he was old. Joseph's brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them. So they hated Joseph. They couldn't even speak one kind word to him. They said to one another, "Come. Let's kill him."

Joseph's older brother Reuben heard them. He tried to save Joseph from them. "Let's not spill any blood. Throw him into this empty well here in the desert. But don't harm him yourselves." Reuben said that to save Joseph from them. He was hoping to he could take him back to his father.

As they sat down to eat their meal, they saw some Ishmaelite traders coming from Gilead. They were on their way to Egypt. One of the brothers said, "What will we gain if we kill our brother? Come. Let's sell him to these traders." They pulled him up out of the well and sold him for eight ounces of silver.

Just like Joseph, Jesus would eventually have to leave his home and father. His brothers would hate him, want him dead, and he would be sold for silver through Judas' betrayal.

JOSEPH IS PUT IN CHARGE OF EGYPT

Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. An Egyptian named Potiphar had bought him. Potiphar was one of Pharaoh's officials. He was the captain of the palace guard. The Lord was with Joseph. So Potiphar put Joseph in charge of everything he owned.

One night Pharaoh had two dreams. All of the magicians and wise men of Egypt were not able to tell him what they meant. Then Joseph was called, and he was able to

interpret the dreams for him. The Pharaoh said to Joseph, “God has made all of this known to you. No one is as wise and understanding as you are. All of my people must obey your orders.

A seven year famine came to the land. Through Pharaoh’s dreams, Joseph was able to plan ahead and ensure that there was food to eat in Egypt. When Jacob found out that there was grain in Egypt, he sent his sons to go and buy some. Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me. I am your brother Joseph. I’m the one you sold into Egypt. But don’t be upset. And don’t be angry with yourselves because you sold me here. God sent me ahead of you to save many lives.”

Then Joseph sent his brothers back to bring their father. Israel said, “My son Joseph is still alive. I’ll go and see him before I die.” So Jacob and his whole family went to Egypt. They took their livestock with them. And they took everything they had gotten in Canaan.

Again, just like Joseph, Jesus Christ was sent on ahead to save many lives through the forgiveness that is offered to each of us today.

2

ISRAELI TRANSITION

THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL ARE SLAVES IN EGYPT

The people of Israel had many children. They greatly increased their numbers. There were so many of them that they filled the land.

Then a new king came to power in Egypt. He didn’t know anything about Joseph. So the Egyptians put slave drivers over the people of Israel. The slave drivers beat

them down and made them work hard. But the more the slave drivers beat them down, the more the Israelites increased their numbers and spread out. So the Egyptians became afraid of them.

Then Pharaoh gave an order to all of his people. He said, "You must throw every Israelite baby boy into the Nile River."

MOSES IS BORN

A man and a woman from the tribe of Levi got married. She became pregnant and had a son. She saw that her baby was a fine child. So she hid him for three months. After that, she couldn't hide him any longer. So she got a basket and placed the child in it. She put the basket in the tall grass that grew along the bank of the Nile River.

Pharaoh's daughter went down to the river to take a bath. She saw the basket in the tall grass. When she opened it, she saw the baby. He was crying. She felt sorry for him. She named him Moses.

THE LORD SENDS MOSES TO SAVE HIS PEOPLE

The angel of the Lord appeared to Moses from inside a burning bush. Moses saw that the bush was on fire. But it didn't burn up. So Moses thought, "I'll go over and see this strange sight. Why doesn't the bush burn up?"

God spoke to him from inside the bush. He called out, "Moses! Moses! I am the God of your father. I am the God of Abraham. I am the God of Isaac. And I am the God of Jacob. I have seen my people suffer in Egypt. Israel's cry for help has reached me. So I have come down to save them from the Egyptians. I want you to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you and your people go. Only a mighty hand could make him do that. So I will reach my hand out. I will strike the Egyptians with all kinds of miracles. After that, he will let you go."

So the Lord sent nine plagues on Egypt. He turned the water into blood, covered the whole country with frogs, gnats, and flies. He killed all of the Egyptian livestock, covered the Egyptians with boils, sent a great hail storm, covered the ground with locusts, and covered the land in darkness for three days.

The Lord had spoken to Moses, He had said, "I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. After that, he will let you and your people go."

Moses said, "The Lord says, 'About midnight I will go through every part of Egypt. Every oldest son in Egypt will die. The oldest son of Pharaoh will die. There will be loud crying all over Egypt. It will be worse than it's ever been before. And nothing like it will ever be heard again.'"

At midnight the Lord struck down every oldest son in Egypt. During the night, Pharaoh sent for Moses. He said to him, "Get out of here! You and the Israelites, leave my people!"

This event became known as the "Passover". God had another plan to save his people, where he would sacrifice his oldest son Jesus Christ to free people from their bondage of sin.

So God led the people toward the Red Sea by taking them on a road through the desert. By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud. It guided them on their way. At night he led them with a pillar of fire. It gave them light. So they could travel by day or at night.

Then Moses reached his hand out over the Red Sea. All that night the Lord pushed the sea back with a strong east wind. He turned the sea into dry land. The waters were parted. The people of Israel went through the sea on dry ground. There was a wall of water on their right side and on their left.

When it seems like there is simply no way to escape life's troubles, God will show you a way. Jesus is "the way and the truth and the life."

GOD GIVES HIS PEOPLE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Exactly three months after the people of Israel left Egypt, they came to the Desert of Sinai. They camped there in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up the mountain to God. Here are all of the words God spoke. He said, "I am the Lord your God. I brought you out of Egypt. That is the land where you were slaves."

"Do not put any other gods in place of me."

"Do not make statues of gods."

"Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God."

"Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy."

"Honour your father and mother."

"Do not commit murder."

"Do not commit adultery."

"Do not steal."

"Do not give false witness against your neighbour."

"Do not long for anything that belongs to your neighbour."

The Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Then he gave him two tablets of the covenant. They were made out of stone. The words on them were written by the finger of God.

God knew that the people weren't going to be able to keep these ten simple rules. It was God's plan from the beginning to send his son Jesus to be perfect, and to set the example by keeping the rules in their place.

For forty years the people of Israel continued their travels. When the cloud lifted from above the holy tent, they started out. But if the cloud didn't lift, they did not start out. They stayed until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was above the holy tent during the day. Fire was in the cloud at night. The whole community of Israel could see the cloud during all of their travels, until they reached the land of Canaan.

ISRAEL ASKS SAMUEL FOR A KING

After Israel entered the land of Canaan, they were given leaders that were called judges. One of the last judges was Samuel. When Samuel became old, he appointed his sons to serve as judges for Israel. They were only interested in making money.

So all of the elders of Israel gathered together. They said to Samuel, “You are old. Your sons don’t live as you do. So appoint a king to lead us. We want a king just like the kings all of the other nations have.”

Samuel wasn’t pleased when they said, “Give us a king to lead us.” So he prayed to the Lord.

The Lord told him, “Listen to everything the people are saying to you. You are not the one they have turned their backs on. I am the one they do not want as their king. About this time tomorrow I will send you a man. Anoint him to be the leader of my people Israel. His name is Saul.” Then Samuel took a bottle of olive oil. He poured it on Saul’s head and kissed him. He said, “The Lord has anointed you to be the leader of his people.”

But Saul didn’t obey all of the Lord’s commands, so Samuel said, “But now your kingdom won’t last. The Lord has already looked for a man who is dear to his heart. He has appointed him leader of his people.”

SAMUEL ANOINTS DAVID TO BE ISRAEL’S KING

The Lord said to Samuel, “Fill your animal horn with olive oil and go on your way. I am sending you to Jesse in Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.”

So Jesse sent for his son and had him brought in. His skin was tanned. He had a fine appearance and handsome features.

Then the Lord said, “Get up and anoint him. He is the one.”

So Samuel got the animal horn that was filled with olive oil. He anointed David in front of his brothers. From that

day on, the Spirit of the Lord came on David with power. *David, from Bethlehem, was a forefather of Jesus. God chose David, a godly man, to be the king that would prepare the people for the true king Jesus Christ.*

DAVID KILLS GOLIATH

The Philistines gathered their army together for war. A mighty hero named Goliath came out of the Philistine camp. He was more than nine feet tall. Goliath stood and shouted to the soldiers of Israel. He said, “Choose one of your men. Have him come down and face me. If he’s able to fight and kill me, we’ll become your slaves. But if I win and kill him, you will become our slaves and serve us.” Then David picked up his wooden staff. He went down to a stream and chose five smooth stones. He put them in the pocket of his shepherd’s bag. Then he took his sling in his hand and approached Goliath. David said to Goliath, “This very day the Lord will hand you over to me. I’ll strike you down. I’ll cut your head off. Then the whole world will know there is a God in Israel.”

As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly to the battle line to meet him. He reached into his bag. He took out a stone. He put it in his sling. He slung it at Goliath. The stone hit him in the forehead and sank into it. He fell to the ground on his face. David ran and stood over him. He took hold of Goliath’s sword and pulled it out. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword. *David’s descendant Jesus eventually came to do battle against evil as well. His battle would be much harder, and his enemy Satan would be much stronger...but Jesus would triumph just the same.*

From that time on, Saul kept David with him. He didn’t let him return to his father’s home. David did everything Saul sent him to do. He did it so well that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. They fought many battles together. During one of those battles, the fighting was heavy around

Saul. Men who were armed with bows and arrows caught up with him. They shot their arrows at him and wounded him badly.

Saul spoke to the man who was carrying his armor.

He said, "Pull out your sword. Stick it through me. If you don't, those fellows will come. They'll stick their swords through me and hurt me badly."

But the man was terrified. He wouldn't do it. So Saul took his own sword and fell on it.

DAVID BECOMES KING OVER ISRAEL

All of the tribes of Israel came to see David at Hebron.

They said, "We are your own flesh and blood. In the past, Saul was our king. But you led the men of Israel on their military campaigns. And the Lord said to you, 'You will be the shepherd over my people Israel. You will become their ruler.'"

All of the elders of Israel came to see King David at Hebron. There the king made a covenant with them in the sight of the Lord. They anointed David as king over Israel. While David was king of Israel, he won many battles over the Philistines. David also won the battle of the people of Moab. The Lord helped David win his battles everywhere he went.

Before David became the king and a mighty hero, he started off as a shepherd boy and a song writer. One example of his writing is the 23rd Psalm.

The Lord is my shepherd. He gives me everything I need. He lets me lie down in fields of green grass. He leads me beside quiet waters. He gives me new strength. He guides me in the right paths for the honour of his name. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid. You are with me. Your shepherd's rod and staff comfort me.

You prepare a feast for me right in front of my enemies. You pour oil on my head. My cup runs over.

I am sure that your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life. And I will live in the house of the Lord forever.

Jesus was later often referred to as “The Good Shepherd”. His flock was the believers, and his job was to lead the flock to God the Father.

DAVID GIVES ORDERS TO SOLOMON

The time came near for David to die. So he gave orders to his son Solomon. He said, “Do everything the Lord your God requires. Live the way he wants you to. Obey his orders and commands. Keep his laws and rules. Then you will have success in everything you do. You will succeed everywhere you go.”

“The Lord will keep the promise he made to me. He said, ‘Your sons must be careful about how they live. They must be faithful to me with all their heart and soul. Then you will always have a man sitting on the throne of Israel.’” David joined the members of his family who had already died. His body was buried in the City of David.

Jesus left instructions for his children (Christians) that were very much the same as the ones that David gave to his son. “Do everything the Lord your God requires. Live the way he wants you to. Obey his orders and commands. Keep his laws and rules.”

So there were 14 generations from Abraham to David. There were 14 from David until the Jewish people were forced to go away to Babylon. And there were 14 from that time to the Christ.

Who Jesus is to me? My Maker, my Husband, Jesus is His name. He is my everything, the One whom I process it all with and whom I lean into.

—Teresa

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

THE COMING BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Herod was king of Judea. During the time he was ruling, there was a priest named Zechariah. He belonged to a group of priests named after Abijah. His wife Elizabeth also came from the family line of Aaron. Both of them did what was right in God's eyes. They obeyed all the Lord's commandments and rules faithfully. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was not able to have any. They were both very old.

One day Zechariah's group was on duty. He was serving as a priest in God's temple. He happened to be chosen, in the usual way, to go into the temple of the Lord. There he was supposed to burn incense. The time came for this to be done. All who had gathered to worship were praying outside.

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah. The angel was standing at the right side of the incense altar. When Zechariah saw him, he was amazed and terrified. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah. Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will have a child. It will be a boy, and you must name him John. He will be a joy and delight to you. His birth will make many people very glad. He will be important in the Lord's eyes. "He must never use wine or other such drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit from the time he is born. He will bring many of Israel's people back to the Lord their God, and he will prepare the way for the Lord. He will have the same spirit and power that Elijah had. He will teach parents how to love their children. He will also teach people who don't obey to be wise and do what is right. In this way, he will prepare a people who are ready for the Lord." Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this?"

I am an old man, and my wife is old too.”

The angel answered, “I am Gabriel. I serve God. I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will have to be silent. You will not be able to speak until after John is born. That’s because you did not believe my words. They will come true when the time is right.” During that time, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out. They wondered why he stayed in the temple so long. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple. They knew this because he kept motioning to them. He still could not speak.

When his time of service was over, he returned home. After that, his wife Elizabeth became pregnant. She stayed at home for five months.

“The Lord has done this for me,” she said. “In these days, he has been kind to me. He has taken away my shame among the people.”

THE COMING BIRTH OF JESUS

In the sixth month after Elizabeth had become pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee. He was sent to a virgin. The girl was engaged to a man named Joseph. He came from the family line of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel greeted her and said, “The Lord has given you special favour. He is with you.” Mary was very upset because of his words. She wondered what kind of greeting this could be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary. God is very pleased with you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son. You must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be like his father David of long ago. He will rule forever over his people, who came from Jacob’s family. His kingdom will never end.”

“How can this happen?” Mary asked the angel. “I am a virgin.”

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come to you. The power of the Most High God will cover you. The holy one that is born will be called the Son of God. Your relative Elizabeth is old, and even she is going to have a child. People thought she could not have children, but she has been pregnant for six months now. Nothing is impossible with God.”

“I serve the Lord,” Mary answered. “May it happen to me just as you said it would.” Then the angel left her.

MARY VISITS ELIZABETH

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in Judea’s hill country. There she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby inside her jumped, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she called out, “God has blessed you more than other women, and blessed is the child you will have! But why is God so kind to me? Why has the mother of my Lord come to me? As soon as I heard the sound of your voice, the baby inside me jumped for joy. You are a woman God has blessed. You have believed that what the Lord has said to you will be done!”

Mary said,

“My soul gives glory to the Lord. My spirit delights in God my Savior.

He has taken note of me even though I am not important.

From now on all people will call me blessed.

The Mighty One has done great things for me.

His name is holy.

He shows his mercy to those who have respect for him, from parent to child down through the years.

He has done mighty things with his arm.

He has scattered those who are proud in their deepest thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones.

But he has lifted up people who are not important.
He has filled those who are hungry with good things.
But he has sent those who are rich away empty.
He has helped the people of Israel, who serve him.
He has always remembered to be kind to Abraham and
his children down through the years.
He has done it just as he said to our people of long ago.”
Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months.
Then she returned home.

JOHN THE BAPTIST IS BORN

The time came for Elizabeth to have her baby. She gave birth to a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had been very kind to her. They shared her joy. On the eighth day, they came to have the child circumcised. They were going to name him Zechariah, like his father. But his mother spoke up. “No!” she said. “He must be called John.”

They said to her, “No one among your relatives has that name.”

Then they motioned to his father. They wanted to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for something to write on. The he wrote, “His name is John.” Everyone was amazed.

Right away Zechariah could speak again. His first words gave praise to God. The neighbours were all filled with fear and wonder. All through Judea’s hill country, people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, and because the Lord was with John, they asked, “What is this child going to be?” His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit. He prophesied,

“Give praise to the Lord, the God of Israel! He has come and set his people free.

He has acted with great power and has saved us.

He did it for those who are from the family line of his

servant David.

Long ago holy prophets said he would do it. He has saved us from our enemies.

We are rescued from all who hate us. He has been kind to our people.

He has remembered his holy covenant. He made an oath to our father Abraham.

He promised to save us from our enemies, so that we could serve him without fear.

He wants us to be holy and godly as long as we live.

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High God.

You will go ahead of the Lord to prepare the way for him.

You will tell his people how they can be saved. You will tell them that their sins can be forgiven.

All of that will happen because our God is tender and caring.

His kindness will bring the rising sun to us from heaven.

It will shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death.

It will guide our feet on the path of peace.”

The child grew up, and his spirit became strong. He lived in the desert until he appeared openly to Israel.

AN ANGEL COMES TO JOSEPH

Mary and Joseph had promised to get married, but before they started to live together, it became clear that she was going to have a baby. She became pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph was a godly man. He did not want to put her to shame in public. So he planned to divorce her quietly.

But as Joseph was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. The angel said, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary home as your wife. The baby inside her is from the Holy Spirit. She is

going to have a son. You must give him the name Jesus. That is because he will save his people from their sins.” All of this took place to bring about what the Lord had said would happen. He had said through the prophet, “The virgin is going to have a baby. She will give birth to a son, and he will be called Immanuel.” The name Immanuel means “God with us.”

Joseph woke up. He did what the angel of the Lord commanded him to do. He took Mary home as his wife, but he did not make love to her until after she gave birth to a son. Joseph gave him the name Jesus.

JESUS IS BORN

In those days, Caesar Augustus made a law. It required that a list be made of everyone in the whole Roman world. It was the first time a list was made of the people while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be listed.

So Joseph went also. He went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea. That is where Bethlehem, the town of David, was. Joseph went there because he belonged to the family line of David. He went there with Mary to be listed. Mary was engaged to him. She was expecting a baby. While Joseph and Mary were there, the time came for the child to be born. She gave birth to her first baby. It was a boy. She wrapped him in large strips of cloth. Then she placed him in a manger. There was no room for them in the inn.

ANGELS APPEAR TO THE SHEPHERDS

There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby. It was night, and they were looking after their sheep. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them. They were terrified.

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy. It is for all the people. Today

in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. Here is how you will know I am telling you the truth. You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a large group of angels from heaven also appeared.

They were praising God. They said,

“May glory be given to God in the highest heaven!

And may peace be given to those he is pleased with on earth!”

The angels left and went into heaven. Then the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem. Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby. The baby was lying in the manger. After the shepherds had seen him, they told everyone. They reported what the angel had said about this child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

But Mary kept all these things like a secret treasure in her heart. She thought about them over and over.

The shepherds returned. They gave glory and praise to God. Everything they had seen and heard was just as they had been told.

4

JESUS’ LIFE AS A YOUNG BOY

THE WISE MEN VISIT JESUS

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea. This happened while Herod was king of Judea.

After Jesus’ birth, Wise Men from the east came to Je

rusalem. They asked, "Where is the child who has been born to be king of the Jews? When we were in the east, we saw his star. Now we have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard about it, he was very upset.

Everyone in Jerusalem was troubled too, so Herod called together all the chief priests of the people. He also called the teachers of the law. He asked them where the Christ was going to be born.

"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied. "This is what the prophet has written. He said,

"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah are certainly not the least important among the towns of Judah.

A ruler will come out of you. He will be the shepherd of my people Israel." Then Herod called for the Wise Men secretly. He found out from them exactly when the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem. He said, "Go! Make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, bring me a report. Then I can go and worship him too."

After the Wise Men had listened to the king, they went on their way. The star they had seen when they were in the east went ahead of them. It finally stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy.

The Wise Men went to the house. There they saw the child with his mother Mary. They bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures. They gave him gold, frankincense and myrrh.

But God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod, so they returned to their country on a different road.

JOSEPH AND MARY TAKE JESUS TO THE TEMPLE

When the child was eight days old, he was circumcised. At the same time he was named Jesus. This was the name the angel had given him before his mother became pregnant.

The time for making them pure came as it is written

in the Law of Moses, so Joseph and Mary took Jesus to Jerusalem. There they presented him to the Lord. In the Law of the Lord it says, "The first boy born in every family must be set apart for the Lord." They also offered a sacrifice. They did it in keeping with the Law, which says, "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

In Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was a good and godly man. He was waiting for God's promise to Israel to happen. The Holy Spirit was with him. The Spirit had told Simeon that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. The Spirit led him into the temple courtyard.

Then Jesus' parents brought the child in. They came to do for him what the Law required.

Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God. He said, "Lord, you are the King over all.

Now, let me, your servant, go in peace.

That is what you promised.

My eyes have seen your salvation.

You have prepared it in the sight of all people.

It is a light to be given to those who aren't Jews.

It will bring glory to your people Israel."

The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them. He said to Mary, Jesus' mother, "This child is going to cause many people in Israel to fall and to rise. God has sent him. But many will speak against him. The thoughts of many hearts will be known. A sword will wound your own soul too."

There was also a prophet named Anna. She was the daughter of Penuel from the tribe of Asher. Anna was very old. After getting married, she lived with her husband seven years. Then she was a widow until she was 84. She never left the temple. She worshiped night and day, praying and going without eating.

Anna came up to Jesus' family at that very moment. She gave thanks to God, and she spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the time when Jerusalem would be set free.

Joseph and Mary did everything the Law of the Lord required.

JESUS' FAMILY ESCAPES TO EGYPT

When the Wise Men had left, Joseph had a dream. In the dream an angel of the Lord appeared to him. "Get up!" the angel said. "Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you to come back. Herod is going to search for the child. He wants to kill him."

Joseph got up. During the night, he left for Egypt with the child and his mother Mary. They stayed there until King Herod died, so the words the Lord had spoken through the prophet came true. He had said, "I chose to bring my son out of Egypt."

Herod realized that the Wise Men had tricked him, so he became very angry. He gave orders concerning Bethlehem and the area around it. All the boys two years old and under were to be killed. This agreed with the time when the Wise Men had seen the star.

In this way, the words the prophet Jeremiah spoke came true. He had said,

"A voice is heard in Ramah. It's the sound of crying and deep sadness.

Rachel is crying over her children.

She refuses to be comforted, because they are gone."

JESUS' FAMILY RETURNS TO NAZARETH

After Herod died, Joseph had a dream while he was still in Egypt. In the dream an angel of the Lord appeared to him. The angel said, "Get up! Take the child and his mother. Go to the land of Israel. Those who were trying to kill the child are dead."

So Joseph got up. He took the child and his mother Mary back to the land of Israel. But then he heard that Archelaus was king of Judea. Archelaus was ruling in place of his father Herod. This made Joseph afraid to go there. Warned in a dream, Joseph went back to the land of Galilee instead. There he lived in a town called Nazareth, so what the prophets had said about Jesus came true. They had said, "He will be called a Nazarene." And the child grew and became strong. He was very wise. He was blessed by God's grace.

THE BOY JESUS AT THE TEMPLE

Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. When he was 12 years old, they went up to the Feast as usual.

After the Feast was over, his parents left to go back home. The boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But they were not aware of it. They thought he was somewhere in their group, so they traveled on for a day.

Then they began to look for him among their relatives and friends. They did not find him, so they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courtyard. He was sitting with the teachers. He was listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at how much he understood. They also were amazed at his answers.

When his parents saw him, they were amazed. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been worried about you. We have been looking for you everywhere."

"Why were you looking for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he meant by that.

Then he went back to Nazareth with them, and he obeyed them. But his mother kept all these things like a secret treasure in her heart. Jesus became wiser and stron

JESUS?

ger. He also became more and more pleasing to God and to people.

5

JESUS IS BAPTIZED BY JOHN THE BAPTIST

JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY

In those days John the Baptist came and preached in the Desert of Judea. He said, "Turn away from your sins! The kingdom of heaven is near."

Tiberius Caesar had been ruling for 15 years. Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea. Herod was the ruler of Galilee. His brother Philip was the ruler of Iturea and Traconitis. Lysanias was ruler of Abilene. Annas and Caiaphas were high priests. At that time God's word came to John, son of Zechariah, in the desert. He went into all the countryside around the Jordan River. There he preached that people should be baptized and turn away from their sins. Then God would forgive them.

Here is what is written in the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

It says,

"A messenger is calling out in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord.

Make straight paths for him. Every valley will be filled in.

Every mountain and hill will be made level. The crooked roads will become straight.

The rough ways will become smooth. And everyone will see God's salvation.'"

John's clothes were made out of camel's hair. He had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all

of Judea. They also came from the whole area around the Jordan River. When they admitted they had sinned, John baptized them in the Jordan.

John saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing. He said to them, “You are like a nest of poisonous snakes! Who warned you to escape the coming of God’s anger? Produce fruit that shows you have turned away from your sins. Don’t think you can say to yourselves, ‘Abraham is our father.’ I tell you, God can raise up children for Abraham even from these stones. The axe is already lying at the roots of the trees. All the trees that don’t produce good fruit will be cut down. They will be thrown into the fire.”

“Then what should we do?” the crowd asked.

John answered, “If you have extra clothes, you should share with those who have none, and if you have extra food, you should do the same.”

Tax collectors also came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?”

“Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” John told them.

Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?”

John replied, “Don’t force people to give you money. Don’t bring false charges against people. Be happy with your pay.”

The people were waiting. They were expecting something. They were all wondering in their hearts if John might be the Christ.

John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But One who is more powerful than I am will come. I’m not good enough to untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His pitchfork is in his hand to toss the straw away from his threshing floor. He will gather the wheat into his storeroom. But he will burn up the husks with fire that can’t be put out.”

John said many other things to warn the people. He also preached the good news to them.

JESUS IS BAPTIZED

Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River. He wanted to be baptized by John, but John tried to stop him. He told Jesus, “I need to be baptized by you, so why do you come to me?”

Jesus replied, “Let it be this way for now. It is right for us to do this. It carries out God’s holy plan.” Then John agreed.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he came up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened. Jesus saw the Spirit of God coming down on him like a dove.

A voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, and I love him. I am very pleased with him.”

JESUS IS TEMPTED

The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert. There the devil tempted him. After 40 days and 40 nights of going without eating, Jesus was hungry.

The tempter came to him. He said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

Jesus answered, “It is written, ‘Man doesn’t live only on bread. He also lives on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took Jesus to the holy city. He had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. It is written, “The Lord will command his angels to take good care of you.

They will lift you up in their hands. Then you won’t trip over a stone.”

Jesus answered him, “It is also written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Finally, the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain.

He showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. “If you bow down and worship me,” he said, “I will give you all of this.”

Jesus said to him, “Get away from me, Satan! It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God. He is the only one you should serve.’”

Then the devil left Jesus. Angels came and took care of him.

JOHN THE BAPTIST IS NOT THE CHRIST

The Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask John who he was. John gave witness to them. He did not try to hide the truth. He spoke to them openly. He said, “I am not the Christ.”

They asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?”

He said, “I am not.”

“Are you the Prophet we’ve been expecting?” they asked.

“No,” he answered.

They asked one last time, “Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

John replied, using the words of Isaiah the prophet.

John said, “I’m the messenger who is calling out in the desert, ‘Make the way for the Lord straight.’”

Some Pharisees who had been sent asked him, “If you are not the Christ, why are you baptizing people? Why are you doing that if you aren’t Elijah or the Prophet we’ve been expecting?”

“I baptize people with water,” John replied. “But One is standing among you whom you do not know. He is the One who comes after me. I am not good enough to untie his sandals.”

This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan River. That was where John was baptizing.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him. John

said, "Look! The Lamb of God! He takes away the sin of the world! This is the One I was talking about. I said, 'A man who comes after me is more important than I am. That's because he existed before I was born.' I did not know him. But God wants to make it clear to Israel who this person is. That's the reason I came baptizing with water."

Then John told them, "I saw the Holy Spirit come down from heaven like a dove. The Spirit remained on Jesus. I would not have known him. But the One who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'You will see the Spirit come down and remain on someone. He is the One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen it happen. I give witness that this is the Son of God."

JESUS CHOOSES HIS FIRST DISCIPLES

The next day John was again with two of his disciples. He saw Jesus walking by. John said, "Look! The Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, so they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned around and saw them following. He asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" Rabbi means Teacher.

"Come," he replied. "You will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying. They spent the rest of the day with him. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

Andrew was Simon Peter's brother. Andrew was one of the two disciples who heard what John had said. He had also followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon. He told him, "We have found the Messiah." Messiah means Christ. And he brought Simon to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas." Cephas means Peter (or rock).

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

Philip was from the town of Bethsaida. So were Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the One that Moses wrote about in the Law. The prophets also wrote about him. He is Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

Jesus saw Nathanael approaching. Here is what Jesus said about him. "He is a true Israelite. There is nothing false in him."

"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree. I saw you there before Philip called you."

Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel."

Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that."

Then he said to the disciples, "What I'm about to tell you is true. You will see heaven open. You will see the angels of God going up and coming down on the Son of Man."

6

JESUS BEGINS HIS MINISTRY

JESUS CHANGES WATER INTO WINE

On the third day there was a wedding. It took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the

wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

"Dear woman, why do you bring me into this?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Do what he tells you."

Six stone water jars stood nearby. The Jews used water from that kind of jar for special washings to make themselves pure. Each jar could hold 20 to 30 gallons.

Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled them to the top.

Then he told them, "Now dip some out. Take it to the person in charge of the dinner."

They did what he said. The person in charge tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He didn't realize where it had come from. But the servants who had brought the water knew.

Then the person in charge called the groom to one side. He said to him, "Everyone brings out the best wine first. They bring out the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink. But you have saved the best until now." That was the first of Jesus' miraculous signs. He did it at Cana in Galilee. Jesus showed his glory by doing it and his disciples put their faith in him.

After this, Jesus went down to Capernaum. His mother and brothers and disciples went with him. They all stayed there for a few days.

JESUS CLEARS OUT THE TEMPLE

It was almost time for the Jewish Passover Feast, so Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courtyard he found people who were selling cattle, sheep and doves. Others were sitting at tables exchanging money.

Jesus made a whip out of ropes. He chased all the sheep and cattle from the temple area. He scattered the coins of the people exchanging money, and he turned over their tables. He told those who were selling doves, "Get these

out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"

His disciples remembered what had been written. It says, "My great love for your house will destroy me."

Then the Jews asked him, "What miraculous sign can you show us? Can you prove your authority to do all of this?"

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple and I will raise it up again in three days."

The Jews replied, "It has taken 46 years to build this temple. Are you going to raise it up in three days?"

But the temple Jesus had spoken about was his body.

His disciples later remembered what he had said. That was after he had been raised from the dead. Then they believed the Scriptures. They also believed the words that Jesus had spoken.

Meanwhile, he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast.

Many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing, and they believed in his name. But Jesus did not fully trust them. He knew what people are like. He didn't need others to tell him what people are like. He already knew what was in the human heart.

JESUS TEACHES NICODEMUS

There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus. He was one of the Jewish rulers. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. We know that God is with you. If he weren't, you couldn't do the miraculous signs you are doing."

Jesus replied, "What I'm about to tell you is true. No one can see God's kingdom without being born again."

"How can I be born when I am old?" Nicodemus asked.

"I can't go back inside my mother! I can't be born a second time!"

Jesus answered, "What I'm about to tell you is true. No one can enter God's kingdom without being born through

water and the Holy Spirit. People give birth to people. But the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised when I say, 'You must all be born again.'"

"The wind blows where it wants to. You hear the sound it makes but you can't tell where it comes from or where it is going. It is the same with everyone who is born through the Spirit."

"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus. "Don't you understand these things?"

"What I'm about to tell you is true. We speak about what we know. We give witness to what we have seen. But still you people do not accept our witness. I have spoken to you about earthly things, and you do not believe. So how will you believe if I speak about heavenly things?"

"No one has ever gone into heaven except the One who came from heaven. He is the Son of Man. Moses lifted up the snake in the desert. The Son of Man must be lifted up also. Then everyone who believes in him can live with God forever.

"God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life."

"God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world. He sent his Son to save the world through him. Anyone who believes in him is not judged. But anyone who does not believe is judged already. He has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

"Here is the judgment. Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light. They loved darkness because what they did was evil."

"Everyone who does evil things hates the light. They will not come into the light. They are afraid that what they do will be seen. But anyone who lives by the truth comes into the light. He does this so that it will be easy to see that what he has done is with God's help."

14

JESUS AND SAMARITANS

THE SAMARITANS DO NOT WELCOME JESUS

The time grew near for Jesus to be taken up to heaven, so he made up his mind to go to Jerusalem. He sent messengers on ahead. They went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him. But the people there did not welcome Jesus. That was because he was heading for Jerusalem. The disciples James and John saw this. They asked, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to destroy them?"

But Jesus turned and commanded them not to do it. They went on to another village.

IT COSTS TO FOLLOW JESUS

Once Jesus and those who were with him were walking along the road. A man said to Jesus, "I will follow you no matter where you go."

Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes. Birds of the air have nests. But the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

He said to another man, "Follow me."

But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

Jesus said to him, "Let dead people bury their own dead. You go and tell others about God's kingdom."

Still another man said, "I will follow you, Lord. But first let me go back and say good-bye to my family."

Jesus replied, "Suppose you start to plow and then look back. If you do, you are not fit for service in God's kingdom."

Jesus is alive. I talked to him this morning....

the crowd was starting to get angry, so he took water and washed his hands in front of them. "I am not guilty of this man's death," he said. "You are accountable for that!" All the people answered, "We and our children will accept the guilt for his death!" So Pilate decided to give them what they wanted. He set Barabbas free. Finally, Pilate gave Jesus over to them so they could carry out their plans to nail him to a cross.

22

THE CRUCIFIXION

JESUS IS NAILED TO A CROSS

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. They put a wooden cross on his shoulders. He had to carry his own cross. On their way out of the city, a man named Simon from Cyrene was passing by. He was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Simon was on his way in from the country. The soldiers forced him to carry the cross. They made him carry it behind Jesus.

A large number of people followed Jesus. Some were women whose hearts were filled with sorrow. They cried loudly because of him.

Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not cry for me. Cry for yourselves and for your children. The time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the women who can't have children! Blessed are those who never gave birth or nursed babies!' It is written, 'The people will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" They'll say to the hills, "Cover us!"' People do these things when trees are green, so what will happen when trees are dry?"

Two other men were also led out with Jesus to be killed. Both of them had broken the law.

They came to a place called Golgotha. The word Golgotha means The Place of the Skull in the Aramaic language.

There they mixed wine with bitter spices and gave it to Jesus to drink. After tasting it, he refused to drink it.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. Pilate had a notice prepared. It was fastened to the cross. It read, JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read the sign. The place where Jesus was crucified was near the city. The sign was written in the Aramaic, Latin and Greek languages.

The chief priests of the Jews argued with Pilate. They said, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews.' Write that this man claimed to be the king of the Jews."

Pilate answered, "I have written what I have written."

When the soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross, they took his clothes. They divided them into four parts. Each soldier got one part. Jesus' long, inner robe was left. It did not have any seams. It was made out of one piece of cloth from top to bottom.

"Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's cast lots to see who will get it."

This happened so that Scripture would come true. It says,

"They divided up my clothes among them. They cast lots for what I was wearing." So that is what the soldiers did. He hung between the two criminals. One was on his right and one was on his left.

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing."

Those who passed by shouted at Jesus and made fun of him. They shook their heads and said, "So you are going to destroy the temple and build it again in three days? Then save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"

placed in it. Then they went home. There they prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath day in order to obey the Law.

THE GUARDS AT THE TOMB

The next day was the day after Preparation Day. The chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember something that liar said while he was still alive. He claimed, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order to make the tomb secure until the third day. If you don't, his disciples might come and steal the body. Then they will tell the people that Jesus has been raised from the dead. This last lie will be worse than the first."

"Take some guards with you," Pilate answered. "Go. Make the tomb as secure as you can." So they went and made the tomb secure. They put a seal on the stone and placed some guards on duty.

23

THE RESURRECTION

JESUS RISES FROM THE DEAD

The Sabbath day ended. Very early on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome took the spices they had prepared. They were going to apply them to Jesus' body. On their way to the tomb they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb?"

There was a powerful earthquake. An angel of the Lord came down from heaven. The angel went to the tomb. He rolled back the stone and sat on it. His body shone like lightning. His clothes were as white as snow. The guards

were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

Suddenly two men in clothes as bright as lightning stood beside them. The women were terrified. They bowed down with their faces to the ground.

One of the men said to them, “Don’t be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here! He has risen! Remember how he told you he would rise. It was while he was still with you in Galilee. He said, ‘The Son of Man must be handed over to sinful people. He must be nailed to a cross. On the third day he will rise from the dead.’ Come and see the place where he was lying.”

Then the women remembered Jesus’ words.

They entered the tomb. As they did, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe. He was sitting on the right side. They were alarmed.

“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “Go! Tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him. It will be just as he told you.’”

The women were shaking and confused. They went out and ran away from the tomb. They were afraid, but they were filled with joy. They ran to tell the disciples, but they said nothing to anyone along the way because they were afraid.

When they reached the disciples, they found them crying. They were very sad. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them told the apostles what they had seen at the tomb.

But the apostles did not believe the women. Their words didn’t make any sense to them.

So Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. Both of them were running. The other disciple ran faster than Peter. He reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there. But he did not go in.

The Lord worked with them, and he backed up his word by the signs that went with it.

Jesus also did MANY other things. What if every one of them were written down? I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

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THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

The story of Jesus Christ does not end with His death on the cross, the resurrection, or His ascension back to heaven. It continues today and will go on for eternity. To continue answering the question "Who is Jesus?" we have to take a look at what Jesus meant to his followers at the time, and some of the challenges that they faced in order to spread The Word about him.

Before Jesus left, he gave orders to the apostles he had chosen. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days. During that time he spoke about God's kingdom. One day Jesus was eating with them. He gave them a command. "Do not leave Jerusalem," he said. "Wait for the gift my Father promised. You have heard me talk about it. John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Then you will be my witnesses in all Judea and Samaria, and you will be my witnesses from one end of the earth to the other."

The day of Pentecost came. The believers all gathered in one place. Suddenly a sound came from heaven. It was like a strong wind blowing. It filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw something that looked like tongues of fire. The flames separated and settled on each of them.

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to speak in languages they had not known before. The Spirit gave them the ability to do this.

Godly Jews from every country in the world were staying in Jerusalem. A crowd came together when they heard the sound. They were bewildered because they each heard the believers speaking in their own language. The crowd was really amazed. They asked, "Aren't all these people from Galilee? Why, then, do we each hear them speaking in our own native language?"

Peter replied, "All of you must turn away from your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then your sins will be forgiven. You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Those who accepted his message were baptized.

About 3,000 people joined the believers that day.

The believers studied what the apostles taught. They shared life together. They broke bread, ate and prayed together. Everyone felt that God was near. The apostles did many wonders and miraculous signs. All the believers were together. They sold what they owned. They gave each other everything they needed. Every day they met together in the temple courtyard. In their homes they broke bread and ate together. Their hearts were glad and honest and true. They praised God. They were respected by all the people. Every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.

Peter and John were speaking to the people. The priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees came up to the apostles. They were very upset by what the apostles were teaching the people. The apostles were saying that because Jesus rose from the dead, people can be raised from the dead, so the temple authorities arrested Peter and John. The next day the leaders called in Peter and John. They commanded them not to speak or teach at all in Jesus' name. But Peter and John replied, "Should we obey you? Or God? There's nothing else we can do. We

have to speak about the things we've seen and heard." The leaders warned them again. Then they let them go. They couldn't decide how to punish Peter and John. They knew that all the people were praising God for what had happened.

This may have been the first time that believers were arrested for spreading The Word, but it certainly wouldn't be the last. In fact, it got much worse!

The apostles did many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. More and more men and women believed in the Lord. They joined the other believers.

The high priest and all his companions were Sadducees. They were very jealous of the apostles, so they arrested them and put them in the public prison. But during the night an angel of the Lord came. He opened the prison doors and brought the apostles out. "Go! Stand in the temple courtyard," the angel said. "Tell the people all about this new life."

Early the next day they did as they had been told. They entered the temple courtyard. There they began to teach the people.

When the leaders heard this, they became very angry. They wanted to put the apostles to death. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel stood up in the Sanhedrin. He was a teacher of the law. He was honoured by all the people. He said, "So let me give you some advice. Leave these men alone! Let them go! If their plans and actions are only human, they will fail. But if their plans come from God, you won't be able to stop these men. You will only find yourselves fighting against God."

His speech won the leaders over. They called the apostles in and had them whipped. The leaders ordered them not to speak in Jesus' name. Then they let the apostles go. The apostles were full of joy as they left the Sanhedrin. They considered it an honour to suffer shame for the name of Jesus. Day after day, they kept teaching in the temple

courtyards and from house to house. They never stopped telling the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

STEPHEN

Stephen was full of God's grace and power. He did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. But members of the group called the Synagogue of the Freedmen began to oppose him. They all began to argue with Stephen. But he was too wise for them. They couldn't stand up against the Holy Spirit who spoke through him.

Then in secret they talked some men into lying about Stephen. They said, "We heard Stephen speak evil things against Moses. He also spoke evil things against God."

Then the high priest questioned Stephen. "Is what these people are saying true?"

Stephen replied, "You people! You won't obey! You won't listen! You are just like your people of long ago! You always oppose the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your people didn't try to hurt? They even killed those who told about the coming of the Blameless One. And now you have handed him over to his enemies. You have murdered him. The law you received was brought by angels. But you haven't obeyed it."

When the Sanhedrin heard this, they became very angry.

They ground their teeth at Stephen, but he was full of the Holy Spirit. He looked up to heaven and saw God's glory. He saw Jesus standing at God's right hand. "Look!" he said. "I see heaven open. The Son of Man is standing at God's right hand."

When the Sanhedrin heard this, they covered their ears. They yelled at the top of their voices. They all rushed at him. They dragged him out of the city. They began to throw stones at him to kill him. The witnesses took off their coats. They placed them at the feet of a young man named Saul.

While the members of the Sanhedrin were throwing

stones at Stephen, he prayed. Then he fell on his knees. He cried out, “Lord! Don’t hold this sin against them!” When he had said this, he died.

What an amazing follower – filled with the Holy Spirit! Even while being stoned to death for his belief in Jesus, the Spirit of the Lord was so strong in Stephen that he used his last breath to seek forgiveness for the people that were killing him!

SAUL/PAUL

Saul was there. Saul was also known as Paul. He had agreed that Stephen should die.

On that day the church in Jerusalem began to be attacked and treated badly. All except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

Godly Jews buried Stephen. They sobbed and sobbed over him.

But Saul began to destroy the church. He went from house to house. He dragged men and women away and put them in prison. Saul continued to oppose the Lord’s followers. He said they would be put to death. He went to the high priest. He asked the priest for letters to the synagogues in Damascus. He wanted to find men and women who belonged to the Way of Jesus. The letters would allow him to take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

On his journey, Saul approached Damascus. Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground. He heard a voice speak to him. “Saul! Saul!” the voice said. “Why are you opposing me?”

“Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.

“I am Jesus,” he replied. “I am the one you are opposing. Now get up and go into the city. There you will be told what you must do.”

The men traveling with Saul stood there. They weren’t able to speak. They had heard the sound, but they didn’t see anyone. Saul got up from the ground. He opened his eyes, but he couldn’t see, so they led him by the hand into

Damascus. For three days he was blind. He didn't eat or drink anything.

In Damascus there was a believer named Ananias. The Lord called out to him in a vision. "Ananias!" he said. "Yes, Lord," he answered.

The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street. Ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias. The man has come and placed his hands on him. Now he will be able to see again."

"Lord," Ananias answered, "I've heard many reports about this man. They say he has done great harm to God's people in Jerusalem. Now he has come here to arrest all those who worship you. The chief priests have given him authority to do this."

But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! I have chosen this man to work for me. He will carry my name to those who aren't Jews and to their kings. He will bring my name to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for me."

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. He placed his hands on Saul. "Brother Saul," he said, "you saw the Lord Jesus. He appeared to you on the road as you were

I used to do a lot of drugs, drinking and smoking 2 packs a day. I would have died. Jesus saved me and delivered me from all that. Someone prayed for me in 2003 and I asked Jesus into my life and all my cravings were gone immediately. The next day at the car dealership where I worked I told all the smokers that God took away my cravings. Now God has blessed me with a wonderful wife and son. Praise God!

— **Michael**

coming here. He has sent me so that you will be able to see again. You will be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Right away something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized. After eating some food, he got his strength back.

Saul spent several days with the believers in Damascus.

At once he began to preach in the synagogues. He taught that Jesus is the Son of God. All who heard him were amazed. They asked, “Isn’t he the man who caused great trouble in Jerusalem for those who worship Jesus? Hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” But Saul grew more and more powerful. The Jews living in Damascus couldn’t believe what was happening. Saul proved to them that Jesus is the Christ.

After many days, the Jews had a meeting. They planned to kill Saul. But he learned about their plan. Day and night they watched the city gates closely in order to kill him, but his followers helped him escape by night. They lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

What a role reversal! Only a few days earlier Paul was determined to put the believers to death, and now the Jews were trying to kill him for teaching The Word.

When Saul came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the believers. But they were all afraid of him. They didn’t believe he was really one of Jesus’ followers. But Barnabas took him to the apostles. He told them about Saul’s journey. He said that Saul had seen the Lord. He told how the Lord had spoken to Saul. Barnabas also said that Saul had preached without fear in Jesus’ name in Damascus.

So Saul stayed with the believers. He moved freely in Jerusalem. He spoke boldly in the Lord’s name. He talked and argued with Jews who followed Greek practices. But they tried to kill him. The other believers heard about this. They took Saul down to Caesarea. From there they sent him off to Tarsus.

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria

enjoyed a time of peace. The Holy Spirit gave the church strength and boldness, so they grew in numbers, and they worshipped the Lord.

PAUL PREACHES IN ATHENS

Paul was waiting in Athens. He was very upset to see that the city was full of statues of gods. All the people of Athens spent their time talking about and listening to the latest ideas.

Then Paul stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus.

He said, “Men of Athens! I see that you are very religious in every way. As I walked around, I looked carefully at the things you worship. I even found an altar with TO AN UNKNOWN GOD written on it. Now I am going to tell you about this ‘unknown god’ that you worship.”

“He is the God who made the world. He also made everything in it. He is the Lord of heaven and earth. He doesn’t live in temples built by hands. He is not served by human hands. He doesn’t need anything. He himself gives life and breath to all people. He also gives them everything else they have. From one man he made all the people of the world. Now they live all over the earth. He decided exactly when they should live, and he decided exactly where they should live. God did this so that people would seek him.

Then perhaps they would reach out for him and find him.

They would find him even though he is not far from any of us. ‘In him we live and move and exist.’ As some of your own poets have also said, ‘We are his children.’”

“Yes, we are God’s children, so we shouldn’t think that God is made out of gold or silver or stone. He isn’t a statue planned and made by clever people. In the past, God didn’t judge people for what they didn’t know. But now he commands all people everywhere to turn away from their sins.

He has set a day when he will judge the world fairly. He has appointed a man to be its judge. God has proved this to all people by raising that man from the dead.”

Paul is a powerful example of what Jesus Christ can do

for us all. No matter what our background is, or what we have done in the past...Jesus has the power to forgive. Not only can he forgive, but he can use us as a powerful tool in spreading The Word.

PARTIAL REVELATION

This is part of the revelation that God gave to Jesus Christ. Jesus shows those who serve God what will happen soon. God made it known by sending his angel to his servant John. John was on the island of Patmos because he taught God's word and what Jesus said.

Look! He is coming with the clouds! Every eye will see him. Hallelujah! Our Lord God is the King who rules over all. Let us be joyful and glad! Let us give him glory!

I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth were completely gone. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem. It was coming down out of heaven from God.

I heard a loud voice from the throne. It said, "Now God makes his home with people. He will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sadness. There will be no more crying or pain. Things are no longer the way they used to be."

He who was sitting on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down. You can trust these words. They are true."

He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last. I am the Beginning and the End. Anyone who is thirsty may drink from the spring of the water of life. It doesn't cost anything! Anyone who overcomes will receive all this from me. I will be his God, and he will be my child."

"Look! I am coming soon! I bring my rewards with me. I will reward each person for what he has done."

“Blessed are those who wash their robes. They will have the right to come to the tree of life. They will be allowed to go through the gates into the city.”

“I, Jesus have sent my angel to give you this witness for the churches. I am the Root and the Son of David. I am the bright Morning Star.”

The Holy Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” Let those who hear say, “Come!” Anyone who is thirsty should come. Anyone who wants to take the free gift of the water of life should do so.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people.
Amen.

So now the questions become: Who is Jesus to you? And what chapter will you write in the never ending story of Jesus Christ?

Put your name in the 4 blanks below

God loved _____

so much that he gave his one and only

Son for _____.

If _____ believes in him

_____ will not die but will have eternal life.

Prayer

Jesus I thank you that you love me so much that you came to earth to die for my sins and failures. Please forgive me. I invite you to live in my heart. I want to be your follower and live with you forever.

I will let others know what you have done for me and for them. I look forward to meeting you. Thank you Lord. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer please sign and date it for your own reference

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- www.p2c.com
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Dr. Nabeel Qureshi:

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What is God? *God.*

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