

Gospel of the Nativity

This dramatized Gospel of the Nativity has been prepared by Sarah Northall for Advent and Christmas 2019. The passages used are John 1:1-14, Luke 1:1-2:40 and Matthew 1:18-2:23 and are quotations from

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*Hear the Gospel of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ
Glory to you O Lord*

JOHN In the beginning was the Word. The Word was close beside God, and the Word was God. In the beginning, he was close beside God. All things came into existence through him; not one thing that exists came into existence without him. Life was in him, and this life was the light of the human race. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

LUKE Many people have undertaken to draw up an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled in our midst. It has been handed down to us by the original eyewitnesses and stewards of the word. So, most excellent Theophilus, since I had traced the course of all of it scrupulously from the start, I thought it a good idea to write an orderly account for you, so that you may have secure knowledge about the matters in which you have been instructed.

JOHN There was a man called John, who was sent from God. He came as evidence, to give evidence about the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not himself the light, but he came to give evidence about the light.

LUKE In the time when Herod was king of Judaea, there was a priest called Zechariah, of the priestly division of Abijah. His wife, who came from the Aaron family, was called Elisabeth. Both of them were righteous in God's sight; they followed all the Lord's commandments and ordinances without fault. They had no

children. Elisabeth was barren, and both of them were of an advanced age.

It so happened, when Zechariah was performing his priestly service before God, according to the order of his division, that the lot fell to him, according to the priestly custom, to go in to the Lord's sanctuary to offer incense. The people were praying outside in a large crowd, at the time of the incense-offering. An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right hand side of the incense-altar. Zechariah was troubled and terror-struck when he saw the angel. But the angel said to him

ANGEL Don't be afraid, Zechariah: your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elisabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. This will bring you joy and celebration, and many will rejoice at his birth. He will be a great man in God's sight; he will drink no wine or strong drink. He will be filled with the holy spirit from his mother's womb, and will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, and he will turn the hearts of fathers to children, and of unbelievers to the wisdom of the righteous. He will get ready for the Lord a prepared people.

ZECHARIAH How can I be sure of this?

LUKE said Zechariah to the angel.

ZECHARIAH I'm an old man! My wife's not as young as she used to be, either!

ANGEL Look here, I'm Gabriel. I stand in God's presence. I was sent to speak to you and give you this splendid news. Now, listen: you will be silent – you won't be able to speak – until the day when it all happens, because you didn't believe my words. But they will come true at the proper time.

LUKE Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, and were surprised that he was taking such a long time in the sanctuary. But when he came out he couldn't speak to them, and they understood that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He made gestures to them, but remained speechless.

So, when the days of his priestly service were complete, he went back home. After that time, Elisabeth his wife conceived. She stayed in hiding for five months.

ELISABETH This is the Lord's doing. At last he has looked on me, and taken away my public shame!

LUKE In the sixth month, Gabriel the angel was sent from God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man called Joseph, from the family of David. The virgin was called Mary.

ANGEL Greetings, favoured one! May the Lord be with you!

LUKE said the angel when he arrived. She was disturbed at this, and wondered what such a greeting might mean.

ANGEL Don't be afraid, Mary, you're in favour with God. Listen: you will conceive in your womb and will have a son; and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be a great man, and he'll be called the son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever. His kingdom will never come to an end.

MARY How will this happen? I'm still a virgin!

ANGEL The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. For that reason the holy one who is born from you will be called God's Son. Let me tell you this, too: your cousin Elisabeth, in her old age, has also conceived a son. This is the sixth month for her, a woman who people used to say was barren. With God, you see, nothing is impossible.

MARY Here I am; I'm the Lord's servant-girl. Let it happen to me as you've said.

LUKE Then the angel left her. Mary got up then and there, and went in excitement to the hill country of Judaea. She went into Zechariah's house, and greeted Elisabeth. When Elisabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby gave a leap in her womb. Elisabeth was filled with the holy spirit, and shouted at the top of her voice:

ELISABETH Of all women, you're the blessed one! And the fruit of your womb – he's blessed, too! Why should this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? Look – when the sound of

your greeting came to my ears, the child in my womb gave a great leap for joy! A blessing on you, for believing that what the Lord said to you would come true!

LUKE Mary said:

MARY My soul declares that the Lord is great, my spirit exults in my saviour, my God. He saw his servant-girl in her humility; from now, I'll be blessed by all peoples to come. The Powerful One, whose name is Holy, has done great things for me, for me. His mercy extends from father to son, from mother to daughter for those who fear him. Powerful things he has done with his arm: he routed the arrogant through their own cunning. Down from their thrones he hurled the rulers, up from the earth he raised the humble. The hungry he filled with the fat of the land, but the rich he sent off with nothing to eat. He has rescued his servant, Israel his child, because he remembered his mercy of old, just as he said to our long-ago ancestors – Abraham and his descendants for ever.

LUKE Mary stayed with Elisabeth for three months, and then returned home.

MATTHEW This was how the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place. Mary, was engaged to Joseph; but before they came together she turned out to be pregnant – by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her husband-to-be, was an upright man. He didn't want to make a public example of her. So he decided to set the marriage aside privately. But, while he was considering this, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a dream.

ANGEL Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to get married to Mary. The child she is carrying is from the Holy Spirit. She is going to have a son. You are to give him the name Jesus; he is the one who will save his people from their sins.

MATTHEW All this happened so that what the Lord said through the prophet might be fulfilled:

ISAIAH Look: the virgin is pregnant, and will have a son, and they shall give him the name Emmanuel.

MATTHEW which means, in translation, 'God with us.'

When Joseph woke up from his sleep he did what the Lord's angel had told him to. He married his wife, but he didn't have sexual relations with her until after the birth of her son.

LUKE The time arrived for Elisabeth's child to be born, and she gave birth to a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had increased his mercy to her, and they came to celebrate with her.

Now on the eighth day, when they came to circumcise the child, they were calling him by his father's name, Zechariah. But his mother spoke up.

ELISABETH No, he is to be called John.

PEOPLE None of your relatives is called by that name

LUKE they objected.

They made signs to his father, to ask what he wanted him to be called. He asked for a writing tablet, and wrote on it 'His name is John.'

Everyone was astonished. Immediately his mouth and his tongue were unfastened, and he spoke, praising God.

Fear came over all those who lived in the neighbourhood, and all these things were spoken of throughout all the hill country of Judaea. Everyone who heard about it turned the matter over in their hearts.

PEOPLE What then will this child become?

LUKE they said. And the Lord's hand was with him. John's father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke this prophecy:

ZECHARIAH Blessed be the Lord, Israel's God! He's come to his people and bought them their freedom. He's raised up a horn of salvation for us in David's house, the house of his servant, just as he promised, through the mouths of his prophets, the holy ones, speaking from ages of old: salvation from our enemies, rescue from hatred, mercy to our ancestors, keeping his holy covenant. He swore an oath to Abraham our father, to give us deliverance from fear and from foes, so we might worship him, holy and righteous before his face to the end of our days.

You, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest One, go ahead of the Lord, preparing his way, letting his people know of salvation, through the forgiveness of all their sins. The heart of our God is full of mercy, that's why his daylight has dawned from on high, bringing light to the dark, as we sat in death's shadow, guiding our feet in the path of peace.

LUKE The child grew, and became powerful in the spirit.

MATTHEW Jesus was born, in Bethlehem of Judaea, at the time when Herod was king.

LUKE At that time a decree was issued by Augustus Caesar: a census was to be taken of the whole world. (This was the first census, before the one when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) So everyone set off to be registered, each to their own town. Joseph too, who belonged to the house and family of David, went from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judaea, David's city, to be registered with his fiancée Mary, who was pregnant. So that's where they were when the time came for her to give birth; and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him up and put him to rest in a feeding-trough, because there was no room for them in the normal living quarters.

MATTHEW And Joseph gave him the name:

JOSEPH Jesus.

LUKE There were shepherds in that region, out in the open, keeping a night watch around their flock. An angel of the Lord stood in front of them. The glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

ANGEL Don't be afraid

LUKE the angel said to them.

ANGEL Look: I've got good news for you, news which will make everybody very happy. Today a saviour has been born for you – the Messiah, the Lord! – in David's town. This will be the sign for you: you'll find the baby wrapped up, and lying in a feeding-trough.

LUKE Suddenly, with the angel, there was a crowd of the heavenly armies. They were praising God, saying,

ANGELS Glory to God in the highest, and peace upon earth among those in his favour.

LUKE So when the angels had gone away again into heaven, the shepherds said to each other

SHEPHERDS Well then; let's go to Bethlehem and see what it's all about, all this that the Lord has told us.

LUKE So they hurried off, and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the feeding-trough. When they saw it, they told them what had been said to them about this child. And all the people who heard it were amazed at the things the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured all these things and mused over them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told to them.

After eight days, the time came to circumcise the baby. He was called by the name Jesus, which the angel had given him before he had been conceived in the womb. When the time came for them to be purified according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him before the Lord. That's what the law of the Lord says:

THE LAW Every firstborn male shall be called holy to the Lord.

LUKE They also came to offer sacrifice, according to what it says in the law of the Lord:

THE LAW A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

LUKE Now there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout, waiting for God to comfort Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. He had been told by the holy spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Led by the spirit, he came into the Temple. As Jesus' parents brought him in, to do for him what the law's regulations required, he took the baby in his arms and blessed God with these words:

SIMEON Now, master, you are dismissing your servant in peace. Just as you said, these eyes of mine have seen your salvation, which you made

ready in the presence of all peoples: a light for revelation to the nations, and glory for your people Israel.

LUKE His father and mother were astonished at the things that were said about him. Simeon blessed them.

SIMEON Listen

LUKE he said to Mary his mother.

SIMEON This child has been placed here to make many in Israel fall and rise again, and as a sign that will be spoken against (yes, a sword will go through your own soul as well), so that the thoughts of many hearts may be disclosed.

LUKE There was also a prophetess called Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having been widowed after a seven-year marriage, and was now eighty-four. She never left the Temple, but worshipped with fasting and prayer night and day. She came up at that moment and gave thanks to God, and spoke about Jesus to everyone who was waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

MATTHEW Some wise and learned men came to Jerusalem from the East.

WISE MEN Where is the one, who has been born to be king of the Jews? We have seen his star rising in the East, and we have come to worship him.

MATTHEW When King Herod heard this, he was very disturbed, and the whole of Jerusalem was as well. He called together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, and enquired from them where the Messiah was to be born.

SCRIBES In Bethlehem of Judaea, That's what it says in the prophet:

MICAH You, Bethlehem, in Judah's land are not the least of Judah's princes; from out of you will come the ruler who will shepherd Israel my people.

MATTHEW Then Herod called the wise men to him in secret. He found out from them precisely when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem.

HEROD Off you go, and make a thorough search for the child. When you find him, report back to me, so that I can come and worship him too.

MATTHEW When they heard what the king said, they set off. There was the star, the one they had seen rising in the East, going ahead of them! It went and stood still over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were beside themselves with joy and excitement. They went into the house and saw the child, with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. They opened their treasure-chests, and gave him presents: gold, frankincense and myrrh. They were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod. So they returned to their own country by a different route.

After the Magi had gone, suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.

ANGEL Get up, and take the child, and his mother, and hurry off to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to hunt for the child, to kill him.

MATTHEW So he got up and took the child and his mother by night, and went off to Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod. This happened to fulfil what the Lord said through the prophet:

HOSEA Out of Egypt I called my son.

MATTHEW When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the Magi, he flew into a towering rage. He dispatched people to kill all the boys in Bethlehem, and in all its surrounding districts, from two years old and under, according to the time the Magi had told him. That was when the word that came through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

JEREMIAH There was heard a voice in Rama, crying and loud lamentation. Rachel is weeping for her children, and will not let anyone comfort her, because they are no more.

MATTHEW After the death of Herod, suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt.

ANGEL Get up, and take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel. Those who wanted to kill the child are dead.

MATTHEW So he got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling Judaea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go back there. After being advised in a dream, he went off to the region of Galilee. When he got there, he settled in a town called Nazareth. This was to fulfil what the prophet had spoken:

PROPHET He shall be called a Nazarean.

LUKE So when they had finished everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, and was full of wisdom, and God's grace was upon him.

JOHN He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to anyone who did accept him, he gave the right to become God's children; yes, to anyone who believed in his name. They were not born from blood, or from fleshly desire, or from the intention of a man, but from God. And the Word became flesh, and lived among us. We gazed upon his glory, glory like that of the father's only son, full of grace and truth.

*This is the Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you O Christ*

