

Bible Studies

Casting the play.

No Christmas is complete without a nativity play. But for the play to be successful it is important to assemble the right cast. “*Pastor*” says the plays director, “*I’ve just taken a good look at the congregation, looks like we have plenty of sheep and donkeys, but we’re a bit short on wise men. Oh and the Sunday School director asked if she could be Herod*” Two Thousand years ago God had to cast the parts fro the very first nativity play ever to be staged. God’s masterpiece production. Just like any other play it was important to fin the right cast.



Mary

Read Luke 1v26-38

Mary could well have been as young as 14 or 15, engaged to be married to Joseph, who would have been quite a bit older than her.

What does this passage tell us about what Mary was like?

How do you think it was that she ‘found favour’ with God?

What was it that made her most suitable for the role she played? v38

What kind of a person was she? 2v19

What kind of things did she have to put up with in her obedience to God?

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14



Joseph

Read Matthew 1v18-24

What kind of a man was Joseph? V19

I like Joseph. We hear very little else of him in the gospel account and many people believe that he died before Jesus started his public ministry at the age of 30. We know he took his faith seriously for he preformed the annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem every year as the law required, *Luke 2v41*. In his day, most people ignored this instruction and only attended the temple every few years.

What conclusion would he have drawn when he discovered Mary was pregnant?

The law prescribed death for the adulteress, by this time it is unlikely that such a sentence would be carried out, but the shame would have be dramatic.

What did Joseph decide to do?

What else could he have done?

Many peoples idea of righteousness would have been to expose the sin, justify himself and see Mary punished for her apparent infidelity. Joseph’s idea of righteousness was quite different, it contained a real compassion. A concept of righteousness that Jesus would later campion.

Although Joseph was not Jesus real father, we can see a lot of Joseph in Jesus. God chose Joseph with great care.

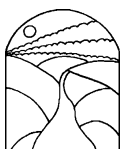
What responsibilities did he have in the Christmas story?

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The walk on parts.



Shepherds

Read Luke 8v8-20

Why do you think God told the Shepherds about Jesus Birth?

Jesus was born in secret, away from public glare. I think God was so excited He just had to tell someone. Such an important event could not go unsung.

Why do you think it was shepherds that God told?

Maybe while the whole world was asleep, shepherds were the only ones around to be told. Maybe it was just that they were ordinary people. But the shepherd, despised most Middle East societies, (shepherds had a bit of a reputation) held a special place in Israel. David, from whose family the Messiah would come, was a shepherd. God described Himself as Israel's Shepherd and Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd. Maybe God was making a point. It is kind of fitting that the Shepherds should visit a king born in a stable.

How do you think the shepherds felt as the story unfolded around them?

What as their response? Luke 2v17-18 & 20



The Magi

Read Matthew 2v1-12

The Magi add a sense of mystery and international flavour. They can be positively identified as the same group of people Daniel was put in charge of 500 years earlier in Babylon. Daniel 2v48. They had a reputation as the power brokers of the Persian kingdoms. It is perhaps due to Daniel's enduring influence that they came at all.

What significance did the star hold?

On a practical level God spoke to them in a language they could understand. Much of the common understanding about the Magi is only tradition and is probably wrong, they did not visit the stable, but arrived when Jesus was 1 or 2 years old, 2v11. They tended to travel in large groups there were almost certainly more than three of them.

Is it significant that Gentile heralded Jesus Birth?

What significance did the Gifts have?

What do you think the gifts were used for?



Herod

Read Matthew 2v13-18

What was Herod's response to the news about Jesus?

Why did he kill two year olds, not new borns?

Why did he respond like this?

Herod was not the legitimate king of Israel, he was an appointee of the Roman occupying force, more than that he was a foreigner. He feared for his throne. We cannot substantiate the story of the slaughter of the innocent from contemporary histories, but we do know a lot about Herod, a man so paranoid that He murdered half his own family of fear they would rebel against him. What he did in Bethlehem is very much in keeping with his character.

There are far too many Herods about.

The meaning of this passage puts Christmas in perspective.

Move over Satan the rightful king has come. This is for you too, the rightful king of your life has come - move over.