

The First Christmas



An Intermediate ESL Reading about Christmas

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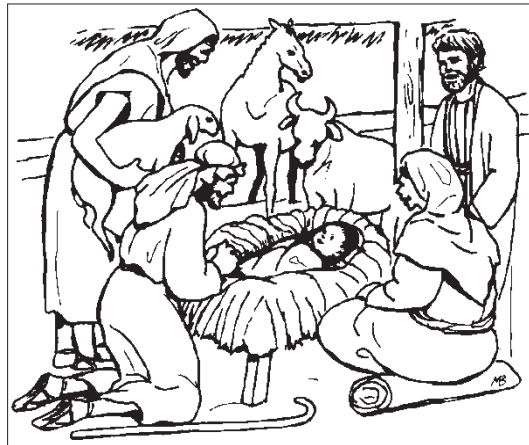
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The First Christmas

A. Discuss the following questions before reading the passage.

1. What is Christmas?
2. Do you celebrate Christmas where you are from?
3. What was the very first Christmas like?
4. What is happening in the pictures below?



B. Read the following passage.

This is how Jesus Christ was born. A young woman named Mary was engaged to Joseph from King David's family. But before they were married, she learned that she was going to have a baby by God's Holy Spirit. Joseph was a good man and did not want to embarrass Mary in front of everyone. So he decided to quietly call off the wedding. While Joseph was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said, "Joseph, the baby that Mary will have is from the Holy Spirit. Go ahead and marry her. Then after her baby is born, name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." So the Lord's promise came true, just as the prophet had said, "A virgin will have a baby boy, and he will be called Immanuel," which means "God is with us." After Joseph woke up, he and Mary were soon married, just as the Lord's angel had told him to do.

Everyone had to go to their own hometown to be listed. So Joseph had to leave Nazareth in Galilee and go to Bethlehem in Judea. Long ago Bethlehem had been King David's hometown, and Joseph went there because he was from David's family. Mary was engaged to Joseph and traveled with him to Bethlehem. She was soon going to have a baby, and while they were there, she gave birth to her first-born son. She dressed him in baby clothes and laid him on a bed of hay, because there was no room for them in the inn.

That night in the fields near Bethlehem some shepherds were guarding their sheep. All at once an angel came down to them from the Lord, and the brightness of the Lord's glory flashed around them. The shepherds were frightened. But the angel said, "Don't be afraid. I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. This very day in King David's hometown a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. You will know who he is, because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay." Suddenly many other angels came down from heaven and joined in praising God. They said: "Praise God in heaven! Peace on earth to everyone who pleases God." After the angels had left and gone back to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about." They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and there was the baby lying on a bed of hay.

When Jesus was born in the village of Bethlehem in Judea, Herod was king. During this time some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem and said, "Where is the child born to be king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." Herod brought together the chief priests and the teachers of the Law of Moses and asked them, "Where will the Messiah be born?" They told him, "He will be born in Bethlehem, just as the prophet wrote, 'Bethlehem in the land of Judea, you are very important among the towns of Judea. From your town will come a leader, who will be like a shepherd for my people Israel.'"

The wise men listened to what the king said and left. And the star they had seen in the east went on ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. They were thrilled and excited to see the star. When the men went into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother, they knelt down and worshiped him. They took out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and gave them to him.

Matthew 1:18-24; 2:1-2,4-6, 9-11, Luke 2:3-17 (CEV)

C. Write T (true) or F (false) on the line next to each sentence. Answer according to the reading.

1. F Joseph wanted to marry Mary because she was pregnant.
2. F Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem to be listed.
3. F The shepherds heard about Jesus' birth from the wise men.
4. T The wise men went to Nazareth to find the child to be born king.

D. Circle the letter for the word or phrase that best defines the underlined word in the sentence.

1. A young woman named Mary was engaged to Joseph ...
a. **planned to marry** b. had a fight with
2. ... name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."
a. thoughts or ideas b. **disobedience**
3. A virgin will have a baby boy, and he will be called Immanuel.
a. **a young woman** b. a person who has never had sex
4. This very day in King David's hometown a Savior was born for you.
a. a person who rules people b. **a person who rescues people**
5. They took out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and ...
a. **expensive spices used in incense and perfume** b. two kinds of metals that are very expensive like gold
6. The wise men ... knelt down and worshiped him.
a. **to get down on one's knees** b. to sit down in front of someone

E. Match the following words with their meanings. Write the correct letter on the line.

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| 1. <u> d </u> embarrass | a. to have your name written down |
| 2. <u> f </u> hometown | b. to show respect and honor |
| 3. <u> i </u> Messiah | c. to be required to, must |
| 4. <u> c </u> had to | d. to make feel bad, ashamed |
| 5. <u> g </u> angel | e. to rescue |
| 6. <u> h </u> prophet | f. where someone was born |
| 7. <u> b </u> worship | g. messenger from God |
| 8. <u> e </u> save | h. person who brings a message from God |
| 9. <u> a </u> be listed | i. name or title of person who God sent to set the people free from sin |

Use the words above to complete the following sentences.

1. Joseph did not want to embarrass Mary.
2. The angel said that the baby will save people from their sins.
3. Joseph and Mary had to go to Bethlehem to be listed.
4. Bethlehem was the hometown of King David.
5. An angel appeared to the shepherds.
6. They said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.
7. The prophet wrote that Bethlehem was an important town.
8. The wise men worshiped the baby born to be king.

F. Answer the following questions by writing a complete sentence. Answer the questions according to the reading.

1. How did Mary get a baby before marrying Joseph?

Mary got a baby from God.
She was going to have a baby by God's Holy Spirit.
God caused her to have a baby by His own power.

2. Why did Joseph decide not to call off the wedding?

Joseph decided to marry her because an angel came and told him to not call off the wedding.

3. What was the good news that the angel told the shepherds?

The angels told the shepherds that a Savior had been born. He was a Savior for them and for everyone. He was born in Bethlehem. The shepherds were to go and see him.

4. Why did the wise men go to Jerusalem?

The wise men knew that a child had been born and that this child would be king. They thought that the king in Jerusalem would know about this new baby.

5. What did the wise men do when they saw Mary with her child?

The wise men worshiped the child and gave gifts to him.

G. Answer the following questions by writing several complete sentences. Discuss your answers in class.

1. How was Jesus' birth different from the birth of other people?

First, Jesus was born by the power of the Holy Spirit. He did not have a father like normal children. Second, the people knew that he would be born because the prophets had written about him and that he would be born in Bethlehem. Third, when he was born, there was a star. Fourth, when he was born, the angels told people about it. Fifth, when he was born, people came with gifts from far away.

2. How did God communicate to people that Jesus the Messiah was coming?

God communicated by the prophets who wrote about Jesus many years before. He also sent the star to tell of Jesus' birth. Finally, he sent the angels to tell the shepherds of his birth.

3. Why was Jesus' birth good news for the shepherds?

The shepherds and the Jewish people were waiting for God to send a Messiah, a Savior, for their people. The shepherds were glad to know that God had finally sent him to save them from their sins.

4. Who gave gifts at the first Christmas? What was the most important gift?

The wise men brought gifts for the child born to be king. But the most important gift was Jesus Christ himself. He was a gift from God for all people. When he grew up, he said that he did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.



Note to Teacher:

If you find that the students don't have enough time to complete sections F. and G. in class, you might consider giving it them as a homework assignment. Then, at the beginning of the next class, you could have them read their answers aloud as a group activity.

If you have a large class, you might consider having the students gather into groups, discuss their answers, and prepare a group answer. Then they could write these on their group answer sheet. I have provided a model group answer sheet on the following page. Note that I have dropped some of the questions so that the students don't have too much to discuss and write.

In addition, on the final page of this document, you will find a survey that the students could possibly use as part of a pre-reading activity. If it would be appropriate in your teaching setting, you could give each student the survey and explain that they are to go and ask the questions to three English speakers and then write their answers. Then, during the first part of the next class, you could have them share their findings. The activity will not only give them practice speaking English with native speakers, it will prepare them for reading the actual passage.

Discuss your answers to the following questions and write an answer for your group.

F. 1. How did Mary get a baby before marrying Joseph?

3. What was the good news that the angel told the shepherds?

4. Why did the wise men go to Jerusalem?

G. Answer the following questions by writing several complete sentences. Discuss your answers in class.

1. How was Jesus' birth different from the birth of other people?

4. Who gave gifts at the first Christmas? What was the most important gift?

Survey about Christmas

- A. Read the following to three speakers of English: I am learning to speak English. I am doing a survey for my English class. May I ask you three questions about Christmas?

Then ask the following questions. Write the answer in the space provided.

1. At Christmas, many people remember whose birth?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

2. Where was Jesus born?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

3. Who came to see baby Jesus when he was born?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

- B. Complete the following sentences to help you tell your class what you learned.

1. _____ of the three people said that Jesus' birth is remembered at Christmas.
2. _____ of the three people said that Jesus was born in Bethlehem.
3. _____ of the three people said that the shepherds and the wise men came to see Jesus.