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The Birth of Jesus.....	4
Nighttime Announcement & Dedication In The Temple.....	10
Jesus’ Childhood in Nazareth.....	16
The Family Trip to Jerusalem .....	23
The Baptism of Jesus.....	29
The Temptation of Jesus .....	35
The Calling of the Apostles, Part 1.....	41
The Calling of the Apostles, Part 2 .....	47
Capernaum, The Town of Jesus .....	53
Recalling Simeon & Anna.....	59
Jesus’ Rejection at Nazareth .....	65
Jesus Calms the Sea .....	71
“Who do people say that I am?” .....	77
Miraculous Signs in the North .....	83
Miraculous Signs in the South .....	89
No One Taught Like Jesus! .....	94
Teaching Along the Way.....	100

The Last Week: Triumphal Entry.....106

The Last Week: At The Temple.....112

The Last Week: The Passover Meal .....118

The Final Day: Gethsemane .....123

The Final Day: Jewish Trials .....130

The Final Day: Roman Trials.....136

Jesus’ Death .....142

Jesus’ Burial & Resurrection .....149

Jesus’ Appearances & Ascension .....155

LESSON ONE

# The Birth of Jesus



Watch *Following the Messiah* episode 1 (0:00 min. - 12:30 min.) by scanning the QR code with the camera on your mobile device.

## PERSONAL NOTES:

Before watching the episode, brainstorm with your group for a few minutes about what you remember about the birth of Jesus and how you imagine it may have looked.

In the remaining space below, record any personal notes or questions that come to your mind as you watch the episode.

## DISCUSSION

Nearly everyone in the western world has some familiarity with the account of Jesus' birth, many in the religious community celebrate an annual holiday in December to commemorate it. The birth probably took place in late September or early spring, since the shepherds were out in the fields; however, nearly every month of the year has been suggested as a possible birth month. What can we learn from examining the Biblical text and comparing it with what we saw in Bethlehem? Additionally, what should it mean to us?



### **THE BIRTH OF JESUS IS ROOTED IN REALITY.**

Luke, the historian of the gospel writers, connects the birth of Jesus to multiple politicians and historical events (Lk. 2:1-7). He mentioned a registration performed to facilitate the taxation, which was completed under the Syrian governor, Quirinius. Luke got the geography correct; he got the politics right. It seems logical to conclude that perhaps the details regarding Jesus' birth are also correct!

One of the significant locations visited in this episode of FTM was The Church of the Nativity, which is a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. The historical tradition of this location goes back to within 100 years of the birth of Jesus when Hadrian built a worship site to Adonis on top of what the locals had long identified as the cave where Mary had given birth. Over the centuries, many buildings have been built on top of others on the same site. Located underneath the altar in the main sanctuary, is the Grotto of the Nativity, the cave where Mary is believed to have given birth. A silver star with 14 points marks the spot on the floor.

The Grotto of the Nativity is one of several caves at this site. You can access the rest underneath the sanctuary of the adjoining, St. Catherine's Church. Perhaps one of the most sobering spots is the Grotto of the Innocents, where the remains of several 1st-century boys were found. Many believe these remains are the silent witnesses of Herod's attempt to kill Jesus (Matthew 2:16-18).



### **CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY**

The Church of the Nativity is a historical building located in the city of Bethlehem. According to long-held tradition, the building is built upon the site where Jesus Christ was born. It was originally built in the 4th century and has had many modifications over the centuries. Below the main hallway, visitors can descend down a number of steps to the remains of a cave. Inside this cave, there are markers denoting the traditional locations of where Jesus was born and where He was laid in a manger.



manger of some animals. Before he was able to return home to Nazareth, his parents fled the country to preserve his life, and an enraged and fearful ruler killed dozens of his peers.

His birth was not what some might expect of Immanuel, "God with us." But it was precisely the kind of entrance into the world that God intended. It was that entrance which God used to teach us about the nature of his kingdom and the humble service it modeled for us (Philippians 2:1-11).

Do you believe the Biblical account of Jesus' birth?

## QUESTIONS

1. Compare your first impressions of Jesus' birth with what you just saw and read. Are there any differences? What are they?
2. What part of the Biblical account of Jesus' birth stands out most to you? Why?
3. One of the things every person needs to consider about the birth of Jesus is the reason he came to earth! What reason did the Hebrew writer give in Hebrews 2:10-18?

## APPLICATION

What impresses you? What catches your attention and excites you? Some people are impressed with opulence, wealth, glitz and glamor. That kind of person won't be impressed with the lowly birth of Jesus. Then, what kind of person will the birth of Jesus attract? Those who are diligently, humbly seeking God (Matthew 5:3-12; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; Hebrews 11:6). Are you one of them? If not, allow the gospel account of the humble, selfless arrival of Jesus to motivate humility, gratitude and a desire for God within you. Take a moment to write a prayer to God thanking him for sending Jesus to earth.

## ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

### **OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES**

Isaiah 7:14 — The miraculous conception and birth of Jesus (cf. Matt. 1:22-23).

Micah 5:2 — The location of the birth (cf. Matt. 2:5-6).

Hosea 11:1 - The Messiah spending time and coming out of Egypt (cf. Matt. 2:15).

Jeremiah 31:15 — Grief in Israel over lost children (cf. Matt. 2:17-18).

### **NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCES**

Matthew 1:18-25 - Matthew's account of Jesus' miraculous birth.

Luke 1:26-38 - The angelic announcement to Mary about the miraculous conception of Jesus.

Philippians 2:1-11 - Paul's inspired perspective on Jesus' arrival in bodily form.

1 Timothy 3:16 - Paul's song/prayer highlighted the features of the gospel, including Jesus' birth.

Hebrews 2:10-18 - The Hebrew writer explained that for Jesus to become our redeemer, he needed to endure what we endure, so he became a man who never gave in to sin.

Hebrews 4:14-5:4 - Since Jesus experienced life in the flesh, he is a sympathetic high priest who deals gently with us.