Men of the Nativity: The Men Who Encountered the Christ Child

A Two-Session Men's Bible Study

This two-session study explores the men who appear in the biblical Nativity story. While Mary understandably receives much of our attention, several men play important roles in the events surrounding Jesus' birth. Their stories offer some wonderful lessons about faith, obedience, courage, humility, and responding to God's call.

Session One: Men Who Were Willing to Trust God

Theme: Faith sometimes means trusting God when we don't have all the answers.

Primary Scripture: Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 1:5–25, 57–80; Luke 2:1–7

1. Joseph – The Man Who Chose Obedience

Matthew 1:18–25

Joseph is perhaps the most understated man in the Nativity story. We hear no recorded words from him, yet his actions speak volumes.

Consider:

- Joseph discovers that Mary is pregnant before they have come together.
- He faces a difficult decision that could have brought Mary public disgrace.
- An angel speaks to him in a dream and explains God's purpose.
- Joseph accepts Mary as his wife and names the child Jesus.
- He trusts God enough to set aside his own expectations.

Discussion questions:

1. What do you imagine Joseph was feeling when he learned Mary was pregnant?
2. Why does Matthew describe Joseph as a righteous man?
3. What does Joseph's willingness to listen to God teach us about faith?
4. Have you ever had to change your plans because you believed God was leading you somewhere else?
5. What can men today learn from Joseph about responsibility, fatherhood, and faithfulness?

Key takeaway: Faithfulness isn't always about having something to say. Sometimes it is about doing what God asks.

2. Zechariah – The Man Who Struggled to Believe

Luke 1:5–25, 57–80

Zechariah was a priest, a man of religious experience and knowledge. Yet when the angel Gabriel announced that he and Elizabeth would have a son, John the Baptist, he struggled to believe.

- Zechariah and Elizabeth were advanced in years.
- Gabriel announced that their son would prepare the way for the Lord.
- Zechariah questioned how this could happen.
- He was struck mute until John's birth.
- When he affirmed that the child's name would be John, his speech returned.
- He praised God in what is traditionally called the Benedictus (Luke 1:68–79).

Discussion questions:

1. Why might a deeply religious man like Zechariah have difficulty believing God's promise?
2. Is there a difference between knowing about God and trusting God?
3. Have you ever found yourself doubting something you intellectually believed?
4. What do you make of Zechariah's silence? Was it punishment, instruction, or both?
5. What does his song of praise tell us about his understanding of God's plan?

Key takeaway: Even people of great faith sometimes struggle with doubt. God's purposes are not defeated by our uncertainty.

3. Caesar Augustus – The Man Who Unwittingly Served God's Purpose

Luke 2:1–7

Caesar Augustus was the most powerful man in the known world. His decree requiring a census brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, fulfilling the prophecy concerning the birthplace of the Messiah (Micah 5:2).

Augustus had no idea that his administrative decision would become part of the story of salvation.

Discussion questions:

1. What is the irony of the most powerful man in the world contributing to the circumstances of Jesus' birth?
2. How might God work through people who have no awareness of God's purposes?
3. Does this story challenge our understanding of power and influence?

Key takeaway: God's purposes are not limited by the intentions or awareness of earthly powers.

Session One Closing Thought

Joseph teaches us obedience. Zechariah teaches us that doubt and faith can coexist. Augustus reminds us that God can work through circumstances far beyond our control.

Question to take home: Where might God be asking you to trust Him rather than rely on your own understanding?

Session Two: Men Who Responded to the Arrival of Jesus

Theme: Encountering Christ calls for a response.

Primary Scripture: Luke 2:8–20; Matthew 2:1–12

1. The Shepherds – Ordinary Men Who Became Witnesses

Luke 2:8–20

The shepherds were ordinary working men, spending the night tending their flocks. They were among the first people invited to witness the birth of Jesus.

- An angel announces the birth of the Savior.
- A multitude of heavenly hosts praises God.
- The shepherds decide to go to Bethlehem.
- They find Mary, Joseph, and the infant Jesus.
- They tell others what they have seen and heard.

Discussion questions:

1. Why do you think God chose shepherds to receive the first announcement?
2. What does this tell us about whom God values?
3. The shepherds didn't wait until they understood everything. They went and saw. What does that teach us?
4. Why do you think they felt compelled to tell others?
5. How might men today become witnesses to Christ in their families, workplaces, and communities?

Key takeaway: You don't have to be important, influential, or highly educated to be a witness for Christ.

2. The Magi – Men Who Were Willing to Seek

Matthew 2:1–12

The Magi are fascinating characters. They were educated men from the East who studied the heavens and recognized something extraordinary in the appearance of a star.

- They traveled a considerable distance seeking the newborn King.
- They approached Herod, expecting to find a royal child.
- They followed the star to Bethlehem.
- They worshiped Jesus and offered gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

- They returned home by another road after being warned in a dream.

Discussion questions:

1. Who were the Magi, and what might have motivated their journey?
2. What does their willingness to travel so far tell us about the importance of seeking God?
3. Why do you think Matthew contrasts the Magi's worship with Herod's fear?
4. What significance might we attach to their gifts?
5. What does it mean for a man to continue seeking Christ throughout his life?

Key takeaway: Faith is not simply something we inherit or accept. It is something we continually seek and pursue.

3. Herod – The Man Who Was Threatened by Jesus

Matthew 2:1–18

Herod provides a striking contrast to the other men in the Nativity story.

He was powerful, wealthy, and politically influential. But the announcement of a newborn king frightened him.

- Herod viewed Jesus as a potential rival.
- He questioned the Magi under the pretense of wanting to worship the child.
- He attempted to use the Magi to locate Jesus.
- When his plan failed, he ordered the killing of the young children in Bethlehem.

Herod represents the danger of allowing power, pride, and self-interest to take precedence over God's purposes.

Discussion questions:

1. Why was Herod so threatened by the birth of Jesus?
2. What is the difference between Herod's response to Jesus and that of the Magi?
3. Can our own pride, ambitions, or desire for control interfere with our relationship with God?
4. What does Herod's story teach us about the misuse of power?
5. What might it mean to allow Christ to be King rather than simply wanting Him to bless our own plans?

Key takeaway: We cannot genuinely welcome Christ while insisting on remaining the unquestioned ruler of our own lives.

Bringing the Two Sessions Together

Here is a useful comparison to conclude the study.

Man	His response to God's activity	Lesson
Joseph	Obeyed	Trust God
Zechariah	Initially doubted	Believe God's promises
Caesar Augustus	Unknowingly participated	God is sovereign
Shepherds	Went and witnessed	Share the Good News
Magi	Sought and worshiped	Keep seeking Christ
Herod	Resisted and opposed	Surrender pride and control

Final Group Discussion

Consider asking the men to reflect on these three questions:

1. Which of these men do you most identify with, and why?
2. Which man's response to Jesus do you find most challenging?
3. If the Nativity story were happening today, what would your response to the arrival of Jesus look like?

Closing Scripture: Philippians 2:5–11

Paul reminds us that Jesus, although in the form of God, humbled himself and became obedient, even to death on a cross.

That passage brings the entire study together. The men of the Nativity encountered a child who would ultimately turn the world's understanding of power, greatness, leadership, and service upside down.

Closing thought for the men:

The Nativity story is populated by men who responded to Jesus in very different ways. Some trusted, some doubted, some sought, some worshiped, and some resisted. The question for us is not simply what these men did when Jesus was born. It is what we will do now that we know who He is.