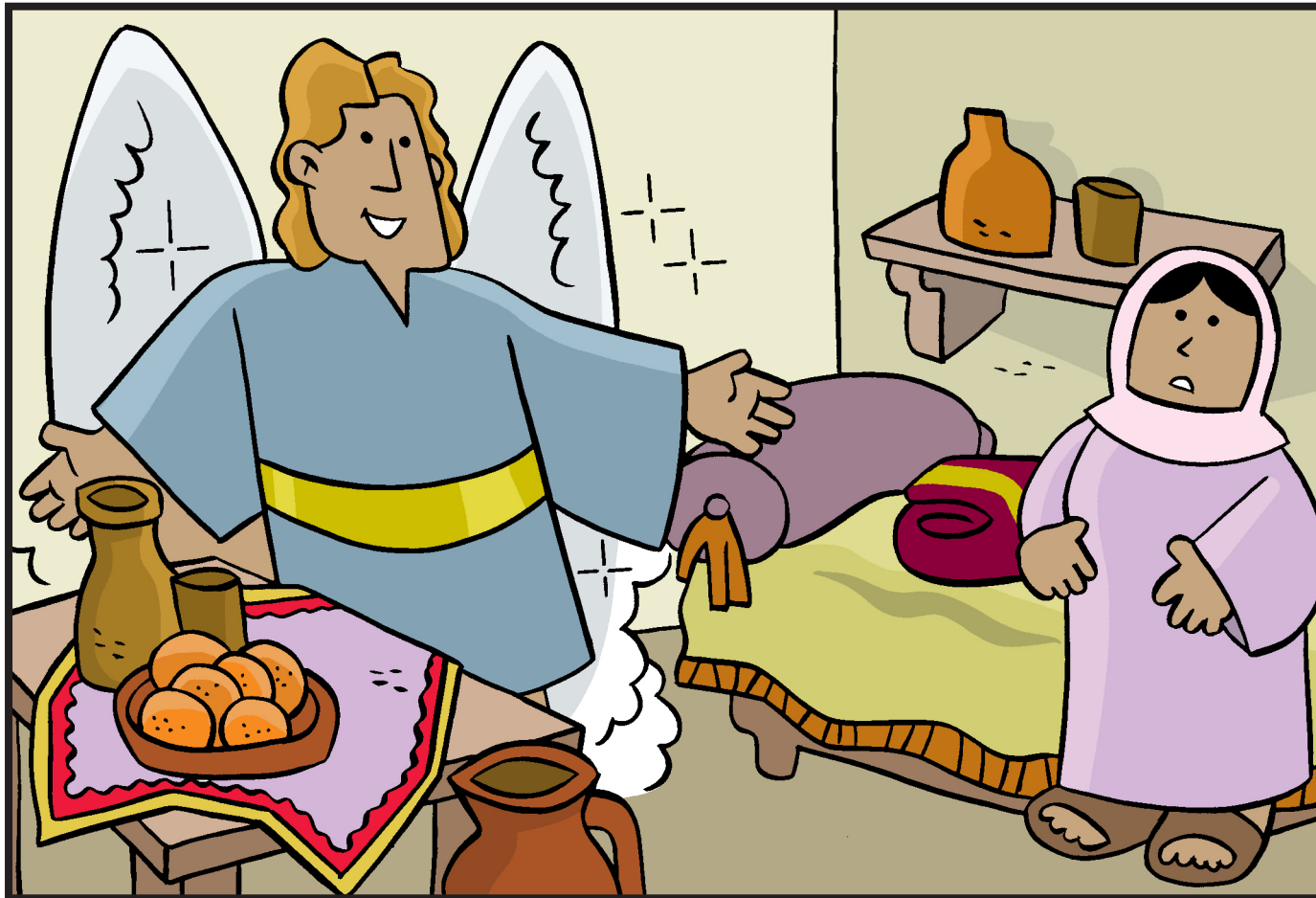


# When Jesus Was Born

It had been more than three hundred years since the last of the great Jewish (Israelite) prophets and much longer since the Israelite kingdom had been at the height of its glory. Centuries earlier, the prophets had prophesied of the restoration of Israel and the coming of the Messiah as the king of Israel.



At this point in history, the land of Israel had been conquered and was under the rule of the mighty Roman Empire. Now, more than ever, the Jewish people were waiting for their promised deliverer—their Messiah who God would send to save them.

In the northern part of what had once been the kingdom of Israel, in the small village of Nazareth, there lived a young woman named Mary who was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph.

One day, while Mary was in her house, a wonderful thing happened—she was visited by an angel of God.

“Don’t be afraid,” the angel said. “I have come to bring you wonderful news! You are going to have a baby!”

“But how can I have a baby?” Mary asked. “I am not even married yet.”

The angel’s answer was marvelous and shocking at the same time. “The Holy Spirit and power of God will give you this baby. This baby will be called the Son of God.”

Mary was delighted by what the angel had told her. She had been chosen to play an important part in one of the greatest and most awaited events in human history.

But the angel wasn't finished with his message yet. "Your cousin, Elizabeth, will also have a baby in spite of her old age. In fact, this woman, who people said would never have a child, is now already six months' pregnant. Nothing is impossible if God wants it to happen."

"What does this mean for me, that the mother of my God comes to visit me? As soon as I heard your voice, the baby leapt for joy!" It appeared that Elizabeth knew what was happening to Mary even before Mary had told her. Even the unborn baby, John, was excited to be in the presence of Mary and the baby inside her.

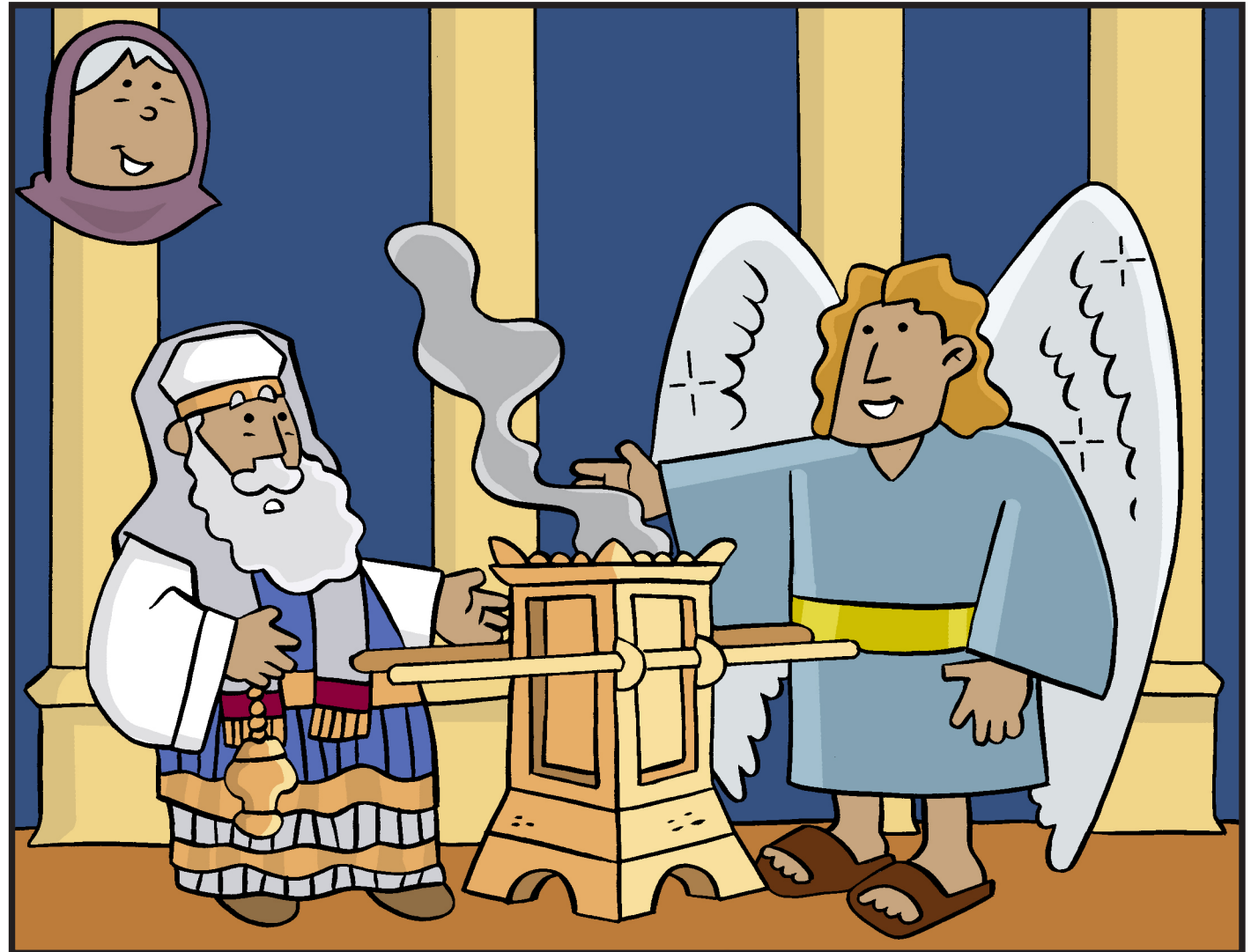
Elizabeth went on to say, "A woman who believes will be blessed, because all the things will take place that the Lord has told her will happen."

## Zacharias and Elizabeth

Mary wanted to talk to her cousin Elizabeth about the good news, so she went on a journey to the hill country where Elizabeth and her husband Zacharias lived.

Prior to this, Zacharias had been serving as a priest at the temple in Jerusalem, when an angel appeared to him and told him that his wife would give birth to a baby boy. The angel told Zacharias to name his son John, and that the spirit and power of the ancient prophet Elijah would be with him. The angel explained that when John was grown, he would turn people back to God in preparation for the coming of the Lord Himself. John was destined to be a prophet who would prepare people for the coming of God's Son.

When Mary entered her cousin's home, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and came to greet Mary, saying,



Filled with delight and wonder, Mary responded with a psalm of praise that came into her heart:

*My soul magnifies the Lord,  
And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*

*God considered my lowly position,  
and from now on, people will say  
that I have been blessed.*

*Because He that is powerful has  
done wonderful things to me, and His  
name is holy.*

*He shows mercy to everyone who  
fears Him.*

*He shows strength, scattering those  
who have proud thoughts.*

*He takes the powerful out of their  
positions, and raises up the lowly  
instead.*

*God will help Israel because of His  
mercy,*

*Just like He promised to our  
ancestors.<sup>1</sup>*

## An Angel Visits Joseph

Now when Joseph, who was soon to be Mary's husband, heard the news that Mary was pregnant, he was worried. It's not proper for Mary to be pregnant before we are married, he thought. People will look down on Mary for this.

Joseph cared for Mary and wanted to protect her from being shamed, so he decided to cancel the wedding and send Mary to live elsewhere.

But one night while Joseph slept, an angel visited him to tell him the truth about the coming baby. The angel told Joseph to not be afraid to make Mary his wife, saying, "The baby that she has inside her is from the Holy Ghost. She will have a son and His name will be Jesus, because He is the one that will save people from their sins." (The name Jesus means "to save.")

This was an amazing revelation. Throughout history, since the first man and woman that God had created, people had sinned and suffered the consequences of their sins. Now Joseph had just been told by an angel of God that Mary was pregnant with the one who would save people from sin. When Joseph woke up from his dream, he did exactly what the angel had told him to do, and he took Mary into his house to be his wife.



# Journey to Bethlehem

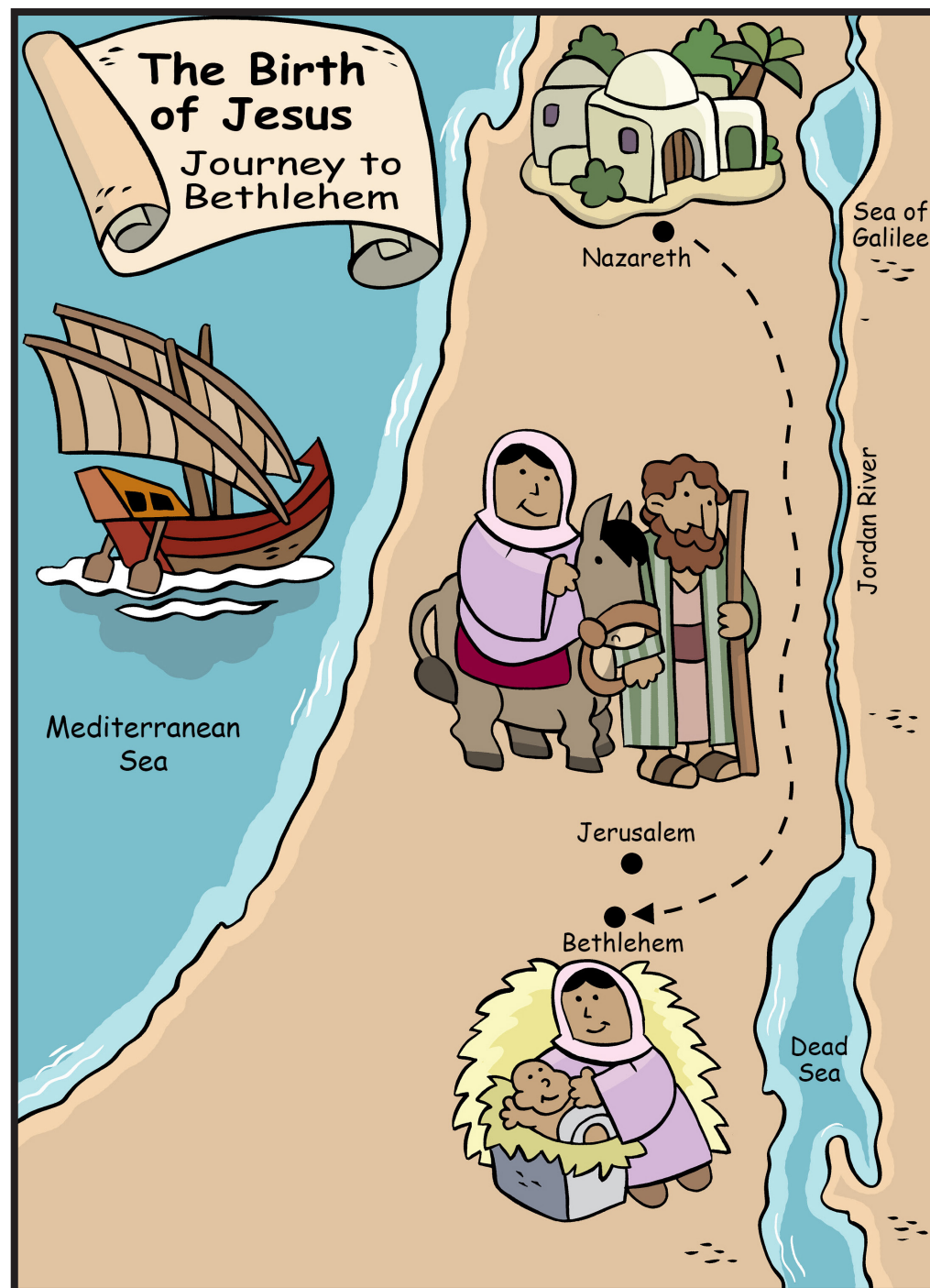
Months later, when the baby Jesus was soon to be born, the Roman Empire, which ruled Israel at the time, announced a law that everyone had to travel to the place they were originally from for a census. (A census was a way for the empire to count its people, and record their names and where they were from. This information was useful when the empire imposed taxes on its people.)

Joseph's family was from the village of Bethlehem, so to obey the law, he and Mary traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem, which was about 125 kilometers to the south of Nazareth. In those times, people on a journey would usually travel between 30 and 50 kilometers in a day. It was important to travel slowly and carefully, because even a small injury could be very serious when traveling long distances on foot. People also had to make sure that they ended each day's travel by making a safe camp with fellow travelers or by finding a place to stay in a village. This was important, because being on the open road after dark was extremely dangerous due to bandits and wild animals.

When Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem, they started looking for a place to stay. But they had arrived late, and all of the houses were full with the many people who had also traveled to Bethlehem for the census. Mary was ready to have her baby, and they desperately needed a place to settle for the night.

Thankfully, somebody was finally able to help them with a place to stay. It was an unlikely place—a stable where animals were kept.

That night, Jesus, the Son of God, who had been sent to save the world, was born in a stable. Joseph and Mary did their best to keep the baby warm. They wrapped Him in cloths and made a bed for Him in a manger. A manger is a trough of wood or stone that is used for the animals' hay or water.





# Shepherds Visit Baby Jesus

The birth of Jesus was a very special event in history. And God worked out some wonderful events to help people recognize Jesus as the savior.

On the night Jesus was born in the stable in Bethlehem, there were shepherds in the fields outside the city, guarding their sheep. Suddenly, a magnificent angel appeared to the shepherds, startling them tremendously.



"Don't be afraid," said the angel. "I bring you good news! Today, in Bethlehem, your Savior has been born! You will find Him wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."



Then many more angels appeared, surrounding the first, singing praises to God. "Glory to God," they sang. "Let there be peace on the earth and the good will of God toward men."

God loved the people of the earth so much that He sent His Son Jesus to bring the peace and goodness of God to the earth.

Once the angels had left, the shepherds ran into Bethlehem and found Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus in the stable where they were staying. The shepherds were blessed to be among the first people to hear the important news of Jesus' birth and to learn what it meant. After they had visited Jesus at the stable, they traveled around the country telling people what they had seen and what the angels had told them.

# Special Prophecy

## Given for Baby Jesus

When Jesus was a few days old, Joseph and Mary made the short trip from Bethlehem to the temple at Jerusalem to dedicate the baby to God. It was the tradition for Jewish people that the first son that a woman gave birth to would be dedicated to God's service.

There were two very old people in the temple that day, a man named Simeon and a woman named Anna, both prophets of God. Ancient Jewish prophets had written about a Messiah, or savior, of Israel, that would be born in Bethlehem. Simeon and Anna knew these prophecies by heart and had been waiting all their lives to see the prophecies fulfilled. The Holy Spirit had told Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the fulfillment of the prophecies about the Messiah with his own eyes.

While Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus were in the temple, the Holy

Spirit led Simeon over to the courtyard where they were standing. When Simeon saw the baby, he was very excited. He picked up the baby and said, "Lord, let me leave this world in peace, because now my eyes have seen the salvation that You have prepared to bring light to all the peoples of the earth and glory to Israel."

The prophetess Anna came up while Simeon was prophesying, and when she realized what she was seeing, she began praising God. Anna's husband had died while she was still young. She never married again, but had spent her life at the temple, fasting, praying, and worshipping. Anna was eighty-four years old, and she would spend the rest of her life telling everybody who was waiting for the promised Savior about what she had seen that day in the temple.



# Seen in the Stars

There were others, too, who learned about Jesus' birth in a very different way. In a country to the east of the land of Israel, there were some important men who studied the stars in the night sky. In ancient times, the study of the stars was very important, because people looked to the stars to see what signs God was trying to show them. When Jesus was born, these wise men saw that a new star had appeared that had not been seen before. According to their studies, this indicated that a king had been born. Joining together, they set out on a journey to find this newborn king, traveling in the direction that they had seen the star.

King Herod was a man who the Romans had made ruler of Israel. When the wise men's journey following the star led them to Israel, they thought that it would be best to pay an official visit to the king to tell him what they were doing and ask for his help.

King Herod ordered his priests to read the ancient prophecies about the Messiah to find out where He would be born. The priests reported that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

Then Herod asked the wise men to go and find Jesus and come back to tell him. Though King Herod pretended to be helpful, he was actually afraid that Jesus would grow up to be king and replace him. Herod's real reason for trying to find Jesus was that he wanted to kill Him.

The wise men continued their journey, following the star, until it led them to a house in Bethlehem where Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were now living. When the wise men saw Jesus, they worshipped Him, and then they presented very expensive gifts to Him, the kind of gifts that kings give to each other. The gifts were gold, which was very valuable as money; frankincense, a sweet incense burned in temple ceremonies; and myrrh, a spice used to prepare a dead body for burial.





When the wise men prepared to leave, God gave them dreams, warning them not to go back to King Herod. Instead, the wise men went home another way, without telling the king where they had found Jesus.

It wasn't long before King Herod realized that the wise men weren't returning to

him, so he sent soldiers to Bethlehem to look for Jesus and kill Him. But God had also warned Joseph about this, and by the time Herod's soldiers arrived, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus had already escaped and were making their way to Egypt.

More than a year later, while Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were living in Egypt,

Joseph received another visit from an angel in his dreams. The angel told Joseph that King Herod was dead and that it was now safe to return home. Joseph took Mary and Jesus, who was now a young boy, and together they returned to the town of Nazareth, finishing the journey that Joseph and Mary had started years earlier.

