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**1Following the Messiah: The Birth of Jesus**

**Opening:**

1. This lesson begins a new study for the April, May and June quarter.

2. We are using material developed by Appian Media. Christians publish this curriculum. Barry Britnell and I traveled together to Israel with Ferrell Jenkins a few years ago.

3. Already you have viewed the video “Following the Messiah Episode 1” at [www.appianmedia.org](http://www.appianmedia.org). and have worked through the study guide available at www.appianmedia.org/free-download.

4. People have built “shrines” on the places traditionally recognized as significant to biblical history so we must look through these “modern” historical sites and imagine the site as it might have been in the first century.

5. Recognize also that although the traditional site may be less than exact, usually the events that concern us happened “near here.”

**Into the Text:**

1. Micah 5:2 predicts that one will go forth from God from Bethlehem to be a ruler in Israel. This is the passage the chief priests and scribes used to identify to Herod where the Messiah was to be born (See Matt. 2:6; Lk. 2:4; Jn. 7:42).

2. One of the interesting features of this whole story is that the people really believed what the prophet said. In our day some do not believe in the existence of God, let alone that He reveals Himself and our history in the Bible. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John believed it. The chief priests and the scribes believed it. The magi believed it. Even Herod seems to have believed it.

3. Bethlehem was a small town (several hundred) in the first century. This affects the number of the male children two years old and under that were slain under Herod’s direction (see Matt. 2:16-18). Can you imagine soldiers coming at the governor’s command to kill your two year old or younger baby? Very personal in a small town of several hundred!

4. Note how Matthew summarizes the history of Israel in 1:17. Obviously the history is very important. Perhaps you have researched your family history. Interesting, intriguing, yes, but for the descendants of Abraham this history was critical. It connected one to the promise of God (Gen 12:1-3). The coming of the Messiah in the fulfillment of the promise was life. It connected your past, present and future to the life given by God. The coming of Jesus was the climax of that history and the life granted by God. So, Jesus’ birth was a crucial event.

5. Jesus was the promised King, from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), a mighty conqueror (Num. 24:17) and descendant of David (2 Sam. 7:12-15; Lk. 1:32). Is it any wonder that Herod felt threatened and slew all the male children in Bethlehem two years old and under?

6. One of the points of emphasis made in the video is the humble beginning of the great King. Paul says, “He emptied Himself” (Phil. 2:7). He gave up the glory He had before with His Father (Jn. 17:5). He became a man. He was born in a particular place. He was associated with a particular mother. Pushed through the birth canal in the usual way. He was wrapped in cloths and laid in a feed trough in a shelter for animals. The Son of God. The Creator. The King.

7. See Bethlehem as more than a visit to the Bible land, more than a visit to a significant place. See God humiliating Himself in becoming man and identifying Himself fully with us in order to save us from sin.

“He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant and being made in the likeness of men . . . Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:7-8).

**Application:**

1. This is the message of the gospel. What effect does this have on you personally?

2. Bethlehem is a real place. What happened here was real. Prophecy was fulfilled. God has really intervened in the history of mankind. How are you a part of this history?

3. Do you really believe that Jesus is the Son of God?