

# CHURCH.

# LESSON 1

<b>1</b>	<b>PRAYER</b>
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*Group leader. Pray* for God’s guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about church building to the Lord.

<b>2</b>	<b>SHARING</b> (20 minutes)	<b>[QUIET TIMES]</b> <b>MARK 1:1 – 4:20</b>
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*Take turns and share (or read* from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times out of the assigned Bible passages (Mark 1:1 – 4:20).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

<b>3</b>	<b>MEMORISATION</b> (5 minutes)	<b>[CHRISTIAN CHARACTER]</b> <b>(1) 2 CORINTHIANS 3:18</b>
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The fifth **series (E)** of memory verses is about **“Christian character”**. The titles of the five memory verses are:

- (1) Christ likeness. 2 Corinthians 3:18.
- (2) Purity. 1 Peter 2:11.
- (3) Love. Mark 12:30-31.
- (4) Faith. Romans 4:20-21.
- (5) Humility. Philippians 2:3-4.

*Meditate, memorise and review* two by two.

(1) **Christ likeness: 2 Corinthians 3:18.** And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

<b>4</b>	<b>TEACHING</b> (85 minutes)	<b>[CHURCH FESTIVAL]</b> <b>CHRISTMAS: COMMEMORATING THE BIRTH OF CHRIST</b>
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*Introduce.* Christmas is the Christian festival in which we commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ. We will learn what the Bible teaches about the first coming of Jesus Christ into the world. We will learn how his first coming has been prophesied in the Old Testament, what happened when he was born on earth, and why his coming into the world is important for us.

## **A. THE EARLIEST HUMAN HISTORY DESCRIBES GOD’S FIRST PROMISE TO PEOPLE**

The first promise in the Bible is in Genesis 3:15. When there was no sin on earth, the devil appeared to the first people, Adam and Eve, in the form of a snake. It is clear from the context that a powerful talking demon was hiding behind this snake. This demon is called “the devil”, which means the slanderer or accuser, “Satan”, which means the opponent and even “the dragon” (Revelation 12:9). He tempted the first man and woman to disobey God’s command and they fell from the state of innocence into the state of sin.

God punished them and said that there would be continuous enmity and conflict between the “offspring” of the devil, that is, the demons and the evil people who take the side of the devil on the one hand, and the “offspring” (literally “seed”) of the woman, that is, the people who take the side of God on the other hand. In the future, one of the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the devil, even though the devil would strike his heel and hurt him much. Thus, God turned the disastrous friendship between the first people and the devil into enmity. God spoke of a continuous struggle between the offspring of the devil and the offspring of the woman. And God spoke of the final victory!

In the light of the New Testament revelation, we know that this struggle is ultimately a struggle between the devil (Satan) and Jesus Christ. Jesus would suffer, first through his Old Testament people and later in his own body on the cross. During the first coming of Jesus Christ, he broke the power of the devil (but not yet ended his power). The New Testament reveals that God predicts with this prophecy (or promise of salvation) that the final battle will be between two personalities, namely, between the devil and Jesus Christ, who would be born of a woman. The devil would attack Jesus and try to kill him, because God had prophesied that he would crush the head of the devil. Although Jesus would suffer through “the devil striking at his heel” and die on the cross, he would conquer the devil and finally crush him! Jesus would be victorious!

## **B. THE OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY RELATES THE STRUGGLE THAT ATTEMPTS TO HINDER THE FULFILMENT OF GOD'S PROMISE**

### **1. The conflict raging from Adam to Noah.**

#### **(1) Adam and Eve.**

God gave the first promise of salvation (Genesis 3:15) to the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. Someone born from a woman would crush the head of the devil. In the beginning Adam and Eve only had two children, Cain and Abel. Cain became jealous and angry with Abel and murdered him (Genesis 4:1-8). It seemed as if the devil wanted to destroy the descendants of the woman, so that God's promise of salvation would not be fulfilled.

But God gave other children to Adam and Eve, men and women (Genesis 5:1-5). In this way the human race would continue and God's promise would be fulfilled! The human race continued and thus God's promise of salvation through a person that would be born within the human race was still possible!

#### **(2) Seth and Noah.**

The third son of Adam and Eve, Seth, was predestined to become the bearer of God's promise of salvation (Genesis 5:6-32). After many years, there were many people on earth. The knowledge of the living God, which Adam and Eve had passed on to their descendants, had become so vague that the human race submitted to a complete corrupt life-style. "The sons of God" (that is, the descendants of Seth represented the people who continued to follow God) began to marry "the daughters of Cain" (that is, the descendants of Cain represented the people who only followed other humans) (read Genesis 6:1-4; cf. Deuteronomy 7:1-4; 2 Corinthians 6:14). The result was that the wickedness on earth became exceedingly great. "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5). So God decided to destroy the whole human race with a flood (Genesis 6:5-7,11-13). It seemed as if the devil would succeed to destroy the human race, which carried the promise of God's salvation.

But God found one man who was righteous among his contemporaries and lived a blameless life: Noah. "He walked with God" (Genesis 6:8-9). God saved Noah and his family from destruction in the flood (Genesis 6:14 – 8:22). The human race continued and in this way God's promise of salvation through a person that would be born within the human race was still a possibility!

### **2. The conflict raging from Noah to Judah.**

#### **(1) Abram (2157-1992 B.C.)**

In the twenty-first century B.C., *the promise of salvation through the coming Saviour* was given to Abraham (Abram) and Sarah (Sarai). God promised that their descendants (literally "seed") would be as numerous "as the stars in heaven" and "as the sand of the sea". And God promised: "In you (literally: in your seed) all peoples (nations) on earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:3) (read Genesis 11:26-32; Genesis 15:5; Genesis 22:17-18). Humanly speaking, this promise could not be fulfilled, because Abraham and Sarah were old, their bodies were as good as dead and Sarah was barren. Again it seemed as if the devil would triumph.

But a miracle happened. When Abraham was hundred years old, God miraculously gave Abraham and Sarah a son, called Isaac (Genesis 21:1-7)! The red line of God's promise of salvation continued!

#### **(2) Isaac (2067-1887 B.C.)**

*The promise of salvation through the coming Saviour* was given to Isaac (Genesis 26:4), but also his wife, Rebecca, was barren (Genesis 25:21). Again it seemed as if the devil would triumph.

But Isaac prayed to God and God gave them two children, Esau and Jacob.

#### **(3) Jacob (2007-1860 B.C.)**

*The promise of salvation through the coming Saviour* was given to Jacob (Genesis 28:13-14), but his brother Esau wanted to kill him, because Jacob had tricked him out of his right as the first born (Genesis 27:41). Again it seemed as if the devil would triumph.

But God himself promised Jacob that he would protect him wherever he went (Genesis 28:15). Jacob continued to live and the red line of God's promise of salvation continued!

#### **(4) Judah.**

*The promise of salvation through the coming Saviour* was then given to Judah, the son of Jacob with Leah (Genesis 49:10). The kingship would not depart from the tribe of Judah until the promised Saviour has arrived. He would be the king and all the nations on earth would one day obey him (cf. Isaiah 45:22-23; Philippians 2:9-11).

### **3. The conflict raging from Judah to Moses.**

#### **(1) The descendants of Jacob and Judah: the Israelites.**

Between the fifteenth and eleventh century B.C. *the promise of salvation through the coming Saviour* was given to Israel. Because the devil failed to destroy the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he turned his enmity on the Israelites, who were the descendants of Jacob (Genesis 32:28). The Israelites were destined to bring forth the Saviour

(John 4:22). During the 430 years the Israelites lived in Egypt (Exodus 12:40), they became a large nation. Eventually there was a king in Egypt who did not know about Joseph. He oppressed the Israelites and finally ordered the killing of all the male babies of the Israelites (Exodus 1:7-22). Again it seemed as if the devil would succeed to destroy the promised “seed of the woman”.

But God protected the Israelites. Would you believe, he raised Moses right inside the palace of the king and later called him to lead the Israelites out of their slavery in Egypt to the Promised land (Exodus 3:1-12).

#### **(2) Moses (1527-1407 B.C.)**

During the journey through the desert to the Promised Land, the Israelites constantly slipped back into idolatry. They made a golden calf and worshipped it (Exodus 32:1-6). God was indignant and wanted to destroy all the Israelites, with the exception of Moses (Exodus 32:10). Again it seemed as if the devil would triumph.

But Moses interceded with God on behalf of the sinful nation and God heard his prayer (Exodus 32:11-14) to spare the Israelites. And God heard his prayer. Moses is here a “type” (illustration) of Jesus Christ, the Greatest Intercessor, who not only prays for his people, but also gave his life for them (Hebrews 7:25-28)!

#### **4. The conflict raging from Moses to David.**

##### **David (ruled: 1011-971 B.C.)**

During the eleventh century B.C., *the promise of salvation through the coming Saviour* was given to David. David was a descendant of the tribe of Judah. Read 1 Chronicles 17:11-14, a messianic prophecy. God promised to establish the kingship to one of David’s sons (descendants): namely Jesus Christ. This future king would build “a house for God”: namely, the Church (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:20-22; 1 Peter 2:4-6,9-10). God promised that “the throne of this King would be established forever” (Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 12:28-30; Revelation 17:14; Revelation 19:16). God promised that he “would be his Father and he would be God’s Son” (Psalm 2:7; Matthew 3:17; Hebrews 1:5). In Jeremiah 23:5 we read, “The days are coming when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land”. Because God had made these promises to David, the devil tried to destroy David. Goliath failed and king Saul failed twice to kill him with a spear (1 Samuel 18:10-11). Then David’s own son, Absalom, together with a large part of the nation of Israel attempted to kill David, but failed (2 Samuel 15:1 – 19:43). Every time it seemed as if the devil was going to succeed.

But the Bible teaches us that no one can thwart God in carrying out his plan. “The LORD Almighty has sworn, Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand. For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?” (Isaiah 14:24,27)! David was not killed and God’s plan of salvation continued!

#### **5. The conflict raging from David to Ahaz.**

##### **(1) Joash (ruled: 734-727 B.C.)**

Between the tenth and sixth centuries B.C., *the promise of salvation of the coming Saviour* was carried forward by the kings of the southern kingdom of Judah (the 2½ tribes). Time and again, the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel (the 9½ tribes) made war against the southern kingdom of Judah. Athaliah, the wicked daughter of king Ahab (and granddaughter of Omri)(2 Kings 8:18,26-27) of the northern kingdom and the mother of the deceased king Ahaziah had all the royal princes of the family of king David assassinated, because she wanted to have all the power for herself. It seemed as if the devil had finally succeeded to cut the continuous genealogical line of the Messiah and with it the promise of salvation.

But once more, the sovereign God saw to it that the plan of the devil failed! Jehosheba, the daughter of king Jehoram, saved Joash, the son of her deceased brother Ahaziah. Joash was kept hidden in the temple for 6 years until he was crowned king and Athaliah was killed (2 Kings 11:1-21). If Athaliah had succeeded in killing all king David’s descendants, the devil would have triumphed and the promised Saviour would not have been born.

##### **(2) Ahaz (ruled: 734-727 B.C.)**

Later, the northern kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Aram (the Syrians) made a plot to destroy the southern kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 16:5). It seemed as if the surrounding nations would destroy the people of God (the people who believed in the LORD) and that the devil would triumph.

But the prophet Isaiah said to king Ahaz, “The LORD himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:1-14). God promised that, whatever the difficult circumstances in history might be, no one would be able to prevent the coming Saviour to come into the world. The coming Saviour would be called “Immanuel”, which means “God with us” (Matthew 1:20-23). The Bible teaches that the unbelieving nations would fail to destroy God’s people. No nation and no political leader can prevent God from carrying out his plan!

## **6. The conflict raging from Ahaz to Esther.**

### **Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) (ruled: 486–465 B.C.)**

During the fifth century B.C., the Jews (the descendants of the southern kingdom of Judah) lived everywhere in the Medo-Persian Empire. The wicked Haman hated the Jews and had tricked the mighty Persian king Ahasuerus (Xerxes) to sign a royal decree, which ordered the murder of all the Jews in the empire on the 13<sup>th</sup> of the 12<sup>th</sup> month, young and old, women and little children and to plunder their goods (Esther 3:5-10,13). Messengers with letters were sent to every province of the Empire, ordering the murder of every Jew on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month and to plunder all their possessions (Esther 3:13-14). All Jews were threatened with annihilation. If Haman would succeed, the devil would triumph and prevent God's plan of salvation to become a reality.

But God used the Jewish queen Esther to thwart Haman's plan. King Ahasuerus let Haman be hanged on gallows and issued another royal decree that enabled the Jews in his empire to defend themselves against any armed force that might attack them (Esther 8:7-11). The Purim festival on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of the 12<sup>th</sup> month (Adar) commemorates this event. God prevented this catastrophe and the devil again suffered a defeat!

## **7. The conflict raging from Esther to Bethlehem.**

### **(1) Revelation 12:4-5: The dragon and the woman.**

In this conflict between the devil and Jesus Christ throughout the ages, it was Jesus Christ who triumphed! This conflict between the devil and Christ throughout the Old Testament period is described symbolically in Revelation 12:1-5. "The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne." "The woman" is *a symbol* for God's people during the Old Testament period. She would bring forth the promised Saviour (John 4:22). "The dragon" is *a symbol* for the devil (Revelation 12:9). And "the child" is *a symbol* for the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Throughout the history of the Old Testament period, the devil had attempted to hinder the birth of the promised Saviour!

But God saw to it that his plan of salvation would not fail. And it did not fail. No one and nothing can prevent the fulfilment of the plan of the sovereign God of the Bible (Isaiah 14:24,27)!

### **(2) Joseph and Mary.**

Finally *the promise of salvation* of the coming Messiah was given to Mary and Joseph (Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-25). When the time arrived for the coming Saviour of the world, the Messiah, to be born, "the dragon" made some final attempts to prevent this from happening. The Roman king Herod (37B.C. -4 A.D.) was afraid when he heard from the wise men from the East that the Saviour had been born. He was afraid that this Messiah King would threaten his earthly kingdom. So he ordered the murder of all male babies under the age of two years in Bethlehem and the surrounding area (Matthew 2:1-18). Again it seemed as if the devil would triumph through this cruel plan of Herod.

But God's eternal purpose and plan cannot be frustrated and was not frustrated! God sent an angel in the night to tell Joseph to flee to Egypt with Mary and the child. And they stayed in Egypt until Herod had died.

### **(3) Jesus Christ.**

When the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth began, "the dragon" attempted to subject Jesus Christ to himself by tempting him severely (*Read* Matthew 4:1-11). First, the devil tempted Jesus *to trust in himself* (*his own abilities* and become independent from God). He could turn stones into bread. Then the devil tempted Jesus *to have a false trust in God* by applying the Bible in the wrong way. He could throw himself down from the roof of the temple so that angels could catch him. Finally, the devil tried to tempt Jesus to trust in the devil by kneeling down before him and gaining power over all the kingdoms in the world.

But Jesus Christ overcame every temptation of the devil and unmasked the devil as a liar (John 8:44)!

### **(4) The promise was fulfilled: Jesus Christ bound the devil.**

Jesus Christ came to the world to destroy the devil's work (1 John 3:8). During his work of salvation on earth, Jesus cast evil spirits (demons of the devil) out of people and established his kingdom (kingship) (Matthew 12:28-29). Through his death on the cross Jesus disarmed his demons and triumphed over them (Colossians 2:15). Through his resurrection from the dead, his ascension and enthronement, Jesus Christ drove the devil out of his arrogant position as "prince of this (sinful) world" and now reigns triumphantly over all and everyone!

From then onwards, Jesus Christ is drawing people from every nation in the world to himself (John 12:31-32). He is still doing this! By the preaching of the gospel, people are robbed out of the dominion of the devil and brought into the kingdom of Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:13). In this way, the promise, which God made in Genesis 3:15, came to be fulfilled. Jesus Christ, "the seed of the woman" also called "the seed of Abraham" (single)(Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:16) crushed the head of the snake: Jesus Christ conquered the devil! From the first coming of Jesus Christ onwards, Jesus Christ rules over all the powers and authorities on earth and over every title that that can be given (Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:20-22; 1 Peter 3:22)! From the first coming of Jesus Christ onwards, no one can stop him from drawing people of every nation on earth to himself!

## **C. THE PROPHETS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHESED MUCH ABOUT THE COMING SAVIOUR**

The Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Saviour are the oldest prophecies in the world that have been fulfilled! The prophets prophesied that this coming Saviour would be the Greatest Prophet, the Last High Priest and the Highest King.

### **1. At the beginning of human history.**

God prophesied that the coming Saviour would be born of a woman and crush the devil's head (Genesis 3:15; Luke 3:23,37).

### **2. More than 2100 years B.C.**

God promised to Abraham that the coming Saviour would be "the seed of Abraham", that is a direct descendant of Abraham and that he would bless all the families on earth (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; Galatians 3:16).

### **3. More than 1400 years B.C.**

The prophet Moses prophesied that the coming Saviour would be the Greatest Prophet that ever lived. He would speak the very words of God. And God would demand obedience from all people to him (Deuteronomy 18:15-18; Acts 3:21-25).

### **4. More than 1000 years B.C.**

David prophesied that the coming Saviour would be the Greatest High Priest that ever lived (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 3:1; 4:14-15; 7:22-28). Although people would despise and crucify him and divide his clothes among themselves (Psalm 22:1-18), he would make atonement for their sins by his own death (Isaiah 53:6,10).

### **5. More than 700 years B.C.**

The prophet Micah prophesied that the coming Saviour would be born in the city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Luke 2:11,15). And the prophet Isaiah prophesied that he would be called "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:20-23). He would be crucified for the transgressions of very many people and thereby justify them (Isaiah 53:5,11; Romans 4:25). The prophet Isaiah also prophesied that the coming Saviour would be the Greatest King that ever lived. He would be one in nature with the Mighty God and Everlasting Father and there would never come an end to his kingdom of righteousness (Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:30-33)!

### **6. More than 400 years B.C.**

The prophet Malachi prophesied that the coming Saviour would have a forerunner, a person who would prepare the way for his coming (Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6). This was the prophet, John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11-14; 17:10-13).

## **D. THE EVENTS AROUND THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST**

### **1. The incarnation: the eternal God becomes man in Jesus Christ.**

Jesus Christ did not begin his existence when he was born in Bethlehem. He existed from the beginning with God and is himself God. He possessed the divine nature eternally (John 1:1-5,14-18). When the right time came, Jesus Christ took the human nature without letting go of the divine nature and was born on earth among men. From that time onwards, Jesus Christ not only had a divine nature, but also a human nature. He was completely God and completely man (Galatians 4:4; Philippians 2:5-8; Colossians 2:9). While he was on earth, people saw him grow (Luke 2:52). They touched him, saw his miracles and sinless life, heard his teachings and experienced his salvation (1 John 1:1-3).

### **2. The announcement to Zechariah.**

Before the birth of Jesus Christ, an angel appeared to Zechariah and announced to him that in his old age, he would get a son. His son would be the forerunner (herald) of the coming Saviour! Zechariah doubted God's word and therefore God gave him a sign - he would not be able to speak until God's word was fulfilled (Luke 1:5-25,57-79)! After God's word was fulfilled, Zechariah sang a song of praise, saying that the coming Saviour would be the One through whom God would fulfil his covenant with Abraham (Luke 1:72-73)! The covenant of God's unmerited grace would become a reality to all the nations in the whole world through Jesus Christ.

### **3. The announcement to Mary.**

Before the birth of Jesus Christ, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and announced to her that God had highly favoured her (Luke 1:26-56). She would become the mother of Jesus, but only according to his human nature! She would become pregnant through the super-natural work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Holy One to be born would be called "the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). By his birth, Jesus did not become the Son of God (because he is the Son of God from all eternity). Rather, by his birth, he took on the human nature without letting go of his divine nature! Jesus was always God, and now took on the human nature as well. Although this had never happened before in the history of man, the

angel said that “nothing was impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). In contrast to Zechariah, Mary did not doubt God’s word. Instead, she submitted herself to God’s plan with her life.

#### **4. The announcement to Joseph.**

Before the birth of Jesus Christ, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and announced that the woman to whom he was “betrothed”, would become pregnant by a miracle of God’s Spirit working in her. At that time “betrothal” was regarded as a legal marriage. Joseph should give him the name “Jesus”, which means “Saviour”. He would save his people all over the world from their sins. Joseph was a very dedicated husband. He believed God’s word. He did not reject Mary and he did not have intercourse with her until Jesus was born (Matthew 1:18-25). Joseph and Mary travelled from Nazareth to Bethlehem in order to be registered under the Roman census. In Bethlehem, the baby Jesus was born (Luke 2:1-7).

#### **5. The announcement to the shepherds.**

After the birth of Jesus Christ, an angel appeared to shepherds and announced to them that the coming Saviour had been born in Bethlehem and that he was the expected Messiah! Then thousands of angels appeared and sang that God was going to bring peace to *all the people on earth on whom God’s favour rested*. Everyone who would accept the grace of God would get peace with God! After the shepherds had visited Jesus, they went around telling everybody about it. On his eighth day, Jesus was circumcised (Luke 2:8-24), because he was “born under law” (that is, still under the Old Testament dispensation) (Galatians 4:4).

#### **6. The announcement to Simeon.**

Later, Joseph and Mary took Jesus to Jerusalem to the temple in order to present him to the Lord (Leviticus 12:1-8; Exodus 13:2,12,15). The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. When he saw Jesus in the temple, he prophesied that this baby Jesus would be the light that reveals God to the Gentiles and that reveals God’s glory to Israel. He prophesied that Jesus was destined to separate the unbelievers from the believers in Israel. People would be divided - some would speak *against* Jesus Christ and others would speak *for* Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, this Jesus would reveal the secrets of every human heart (Luke 2:25-35).

#### **7. The warning to the wise men from the East.**

Meanwhile, Joseph, Mary and Jesus lived in a house in Bethlehem. God used a star to guide some wise men from the East to the birthplace of the Messiah-King and Saviour of the world. These wise men were probably acquainted with the prophecies in the Old Testament, which they had heard when the Jews lived in exile in the East (in Babylon and the Medo-Persian Empire). After they had found Jesus, they gave him gifts, which consisted of their costly treasures and they worshipped him. They were among the first to bow their knees before Jesus. After God warned them in a dream not to go back to the wicked king Herod, they returned by another way to the East. King Herod and all Jerusalem with him were disturbed about the news of the coming Messiah-King. Instead of seeking to worship him, many of them sought to destroy him (Matthew 2:1-12).

#### **8. The flight to Egypt and the return to Israel.**

When the wise men had left an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream to flee to Egypt, because Herod planned to kill Jesus. When the wise men from the East failed to report the location of the Messiah-King to the wicked king Herod, he ordered the killing of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under. Until the end it seemed as if the devil would win the battle.

But an angel told Joseph to flee to Egypt. After Herod had died an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph to tell him to return to Israel. Joseph was warned in a dream not to return to Judea. So Joseph, Mary with Jesus withdrew to Nazareth in Galilee, because they feared the new king, the son of Herod, who lived in Jerusalem close to Bethlehem in Judea. Thus, Jesus grew up in Nazareth in Galilee (Matthew 2:13-23).

### **E. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST**

#### **1. Jesus Christ was born as a visible human being in order to reveal the invisible God.**

John 1:1,14,18 says that God took on the human nature in Jesus Christ and dwelt among people in order to make GOD known to us. Jesus says, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Colossians 1:15 says that “Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God”.

Christmas is the festival of the light of God! Jesus Christ is the radiance of God’s glory (Hebrews 1:3).

#### **2. Jesus Christ was born among people in order to save people who repent from their sins.**

John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” And 1 John 4:10 says, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

Christmas is the festival of the love of God who offers eternal life! In his great love, God gave his greatest gift (Christmas gift): Jesus Christ, to the world. John 3:16 does not teach universal atonement! “The world” in John 3:16 is “the world in which mankind lives, alienated from the life of God, laden with sin, exposed to judgement and thus in need of salvation”. It is the world of mankind without distinction with respect to race or nationality. It is also the world of mankind, which is still the object of God’s care. God gave Jesus Christ to the world to save people. Whoever believes in Jesus Christ will definitely not perish, but have eternal life!

**3. Jesus Christ was born among people in order to judge people who do not repent.**

Luke 2:34-35 says, “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.”

Christmas is the festival of the separation of people. Jesus Christ will cause many people to rise and others to fall. Therefore, all people must make a choice for or against Jesus Christ. According to Matthew 21:42-44 and 1 Peter 2:6-8, Jesus will become “a cornerstone” to many people. The people, who trust in him, will never be put to shame! To others he will become “a stumbling-stone”. The people, who disobey him, will certainly stumble and fall. No one can remain neutral with regard to the first coming of Jesus Christ into the world! No one can remain neutral with respect to the message about Christmas!

<b>5</b>	<b>PRAYER</b> (8 minutes)	<b>[REACTIONS]</b> <b>PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD’S WORD</b>
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*Take turns in the group to pray* short to God in response to what you have learned today.  
Or divide the group into two’s or three’s and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

<b>6</b>	<b>PREPARATION</b> (2 minutes)	<b>[ASSIGNMENT]</b> <b>FOR NEXT LESSON</b>
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*(Group leader.* Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples and build Christ’s Church.
2. Preach, teach or study the teaching of “Christmas - commemorating the birth of Christ” together with another person or group of people.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time from half a chapter of **Mark 4:20 – 7:37** each day.  
Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. (2) Purity: **1 Peter 2:11**. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Bible study. Read through the Gospel of John. During the next lesson the Gospel of John will be introduced.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on building Christ’s Church. Include your notes on quiet time, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.