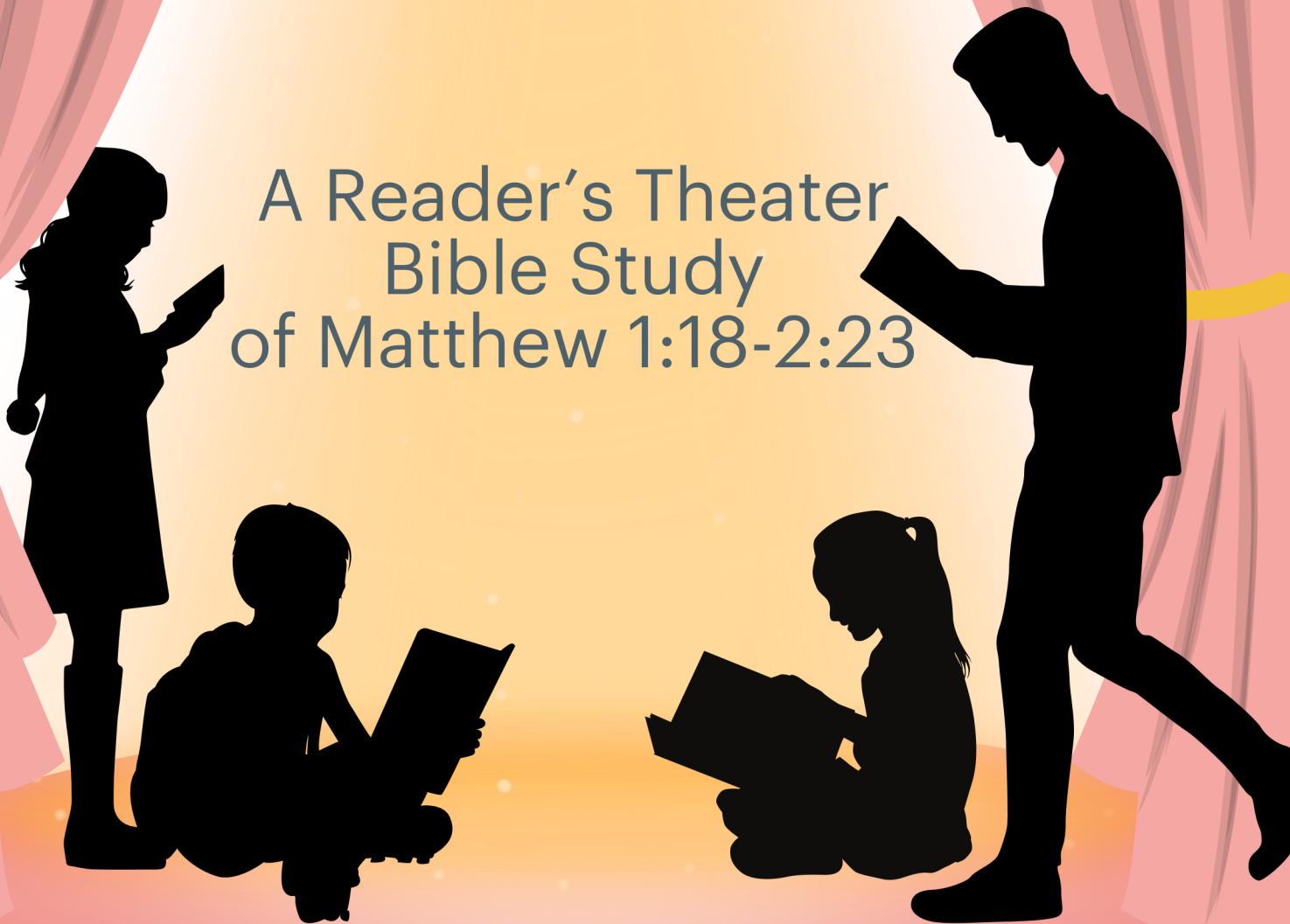




THE BIRTH OF JESUS

A Reader's Theater
Bible Study
of Matthew 1:18-2:23



1 LESSON | LEADER GUIDE + STUDENT WORKSHEET

Leader's Guide

Ready...set...action! Reader's theater is a creative way of inviting students to immerse themselves in the story of Scripture. Not only is it a fun way to read, it also helps readers (and listeners) hear and see the story with greater clarity. You can sit around a table or a living room and simply read it, or you can choose to stand and act it out. Either way works!

After reading the script aloud, follow the discussion guide to explore the story to your desired level of depth. Note that this guide won't be providing "answers" to the questions. Rather, the questions invite you to enter into the story and see what you discover. Your group will have more unique insights than this guide could possibly include. The goal isn't application but rather response. Each story invites us to respond to God.

Before you begin, print out scripts for every member of your group. Decide if you want to print the optional worksheets.

Part 1: Reader's Theater

1. Assign a **role** (or roles) to each person in the group. Note that the roles are different for each story.
 - The number that appears in parentheses after each role lets you know how many lines of script the person filling that role will be reading. This doesn't indicate how many *times* they will speak, but rather how is a measure of how much they'll be reading. If someone in your group struggles with reading, you can give them a role with a smaller number of lines.
 - If you have fewer people than roles, the scripts also note which roles can be easily combined. If you need to further combine roles, consider using simple props and more exaggerated voices to help differentiate them.
2. After you have assigned roles, give everyone a copy of the script and ask them to circle or highlight their parts. You may also want to ask them to read through their parts first and see if there are any words they need help pronouncing or defining.
3. Decide if you want to sit and read or stand and act it out.
4. Before you begin reading, remind everyone to have fun with it!
5. Say "Action!" and enjoy the show!

Part 2: Discuss

Discussion can take place with or without the worksheet. If your students are visual or need something to keep their hands busy or their minds focused, the worksheet can play that role. However, it may be that they engage better through simple conversation. Experiment with it!

1. Help orient students with the setting of the story by asking two questions:
 - **What time is it?**
 - Explore where this story takes place within the larger story of the Bible. If you are using the worksheet, look at the ups and downs of that larger story and what they've all been building to. The stories in this series travel up that steep hill that Jesus is standing on. Anticipation for God's Kingdom is ramping up and there is a sense of desperation.
 - Are there any other markers of time in the story? For example, Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days. Are there any other stories in the Bible where someone was somewhere for 40 marks of time? You might discuss the similarities.
 - **Where are we?** Explore the physical location of where this story took place. Did any other notable stories take place in this location? For example, did any other stories in the Bible involve 40 marks of time in a Wilderness? Are there any connections between those stories?
2. Help students explore who is in the story and what they are doing.
 - **Who is here?** Identify all of the characters in the story, including those who didn't have speaking parts. Have we seen them in other stories? Do you notice any behavior patterns? Remember to point out that God is the main character in every single story, whether He speaks or not.
 - **What do we see each character doing?** What are they like? Most of the time, the people in Bible stories are not playing the role of "hero." Rather, their story acts like a mirror to show us how normal people act. So how are they acting? Are they complaining? Are they suspicious? Are they desperate for something? Ask what you have in common with the characters in this story.
3. (optional) Consider running through the script again at this point.
4. Connect with God.
 - **What is God doing in this story?** What do you see Jesus doing? How is he connecting with the people in the story? If you were in this story, how might he want to respond to you.

If your students have OneStory's Bible Binder, they can file the scripts and workbook pages in the Gospels section.



Reader's Theater: The Birth of Jesus

Roles: Narrator 1 (16), Narrator 2 (14), Narrator 3 (14), Angel (7), Prophet (8),
Wise Man (2), Chief Priest (1), King Herod (2)

*(The following parts can be combined: Angel+Wise Man, Narrator 2+Chief Priest,
Narrator 3+King Herod)*

Narrator 1: Now the birth of Jesus Christ was like this:

Narrator 2: After his mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph, before they came together, she was found pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, intended to put her away secretly.

Narrator 3: But when he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying,

Angel: Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take to yourself Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She shall give birth to a son. You shall name him Jesus, for it is he who shall save his people from their sins.

Narrator 3: Now all this has happened that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying,

Prophet (Isaiah): Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall give birth to a son. They shall call his name Immanuel, which is, being interpreted, "God with us."

Narrator 3: Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took his wife to himself; and didn't know her sexually until she had given birth to her firstborn son. He named him Jesus.

Narrator 1: Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying,

Wise Man: Where is he who is born King of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east, and have come to worship him.

Narrator 1: When King Herod heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he asked them where the Messiah would be born. They said to him,

Chief Priest: In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is written through the prophet,

Prophet (Micah): You Bethlehem, land of Judah, are in no way least among the princes of Judah; for out of you shall come a governor, who shall shepherd my people, Israel.

Narrator 1: Then Herod secretly called the wise men, and learned from them exactly what time the star appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem, and said,

King Herod: Go and search diligently for the young child. When you have found him, bring me word, so that I also may come and worship him.

Narrator 1: They, having heard the king, went their way; and behold, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them until it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.

Narrator 3: They came into the house and saw the young child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Opening their treasures, they offered to him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country another way.

Narrator 2: Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying,

Angel: Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

Narrator 2: He arose and took the young child and his mother by night and departed into Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying,

Prophet (Hosea): Out of Egypt I called my son.

Narrator 2: Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked by the wise men, was exceedingly angry, and sent out and killed all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding countryside, from two years old and under, according to the exact time which he had learned from the wise men.

Narrator 1: Then that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying,

Prophet (Jeremiah): A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; she wouldn't be comforted, because they are no more.

Narrator 1: But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying,

Angel: Arise and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel, for those who sought the young child's life are dead.

Narrator 1: He arose and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

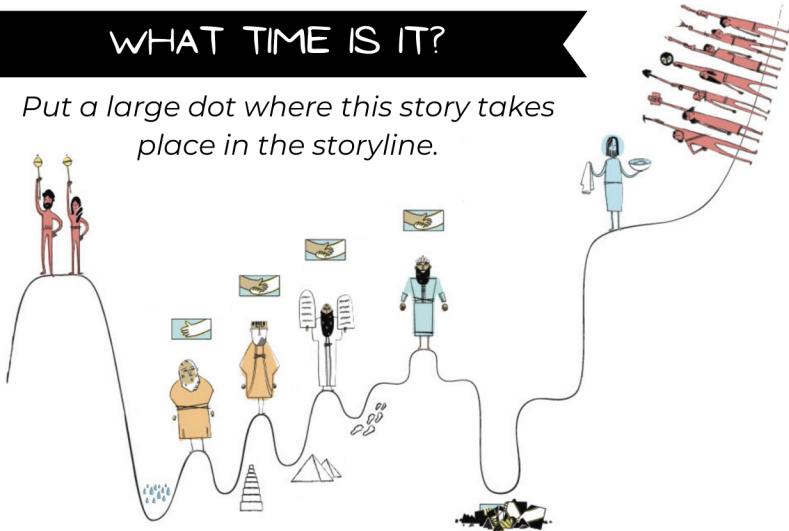
Narrator 2: But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in the place of his father, Herod, he was afraid to go there.

Narrator 3: Being warned in a dream, he withdrew into the region of Galilee, and came and lived in a city called Nazareth; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets that he will be called a Nazarene.

The Birth of Jesus

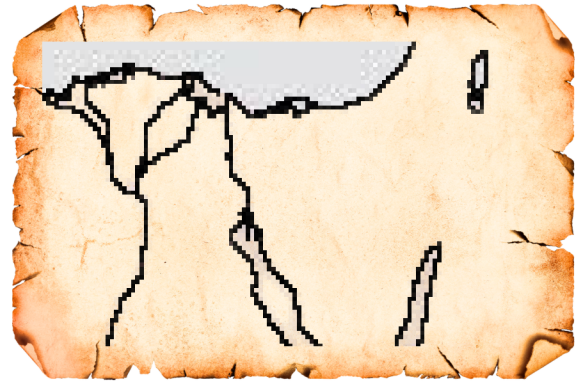
WHAT TIME IS IT?

Put a large dot where this story takes place in the storyline.



WHERE ARE WE?

Draw a 📍 to show where this story takes place on a map.



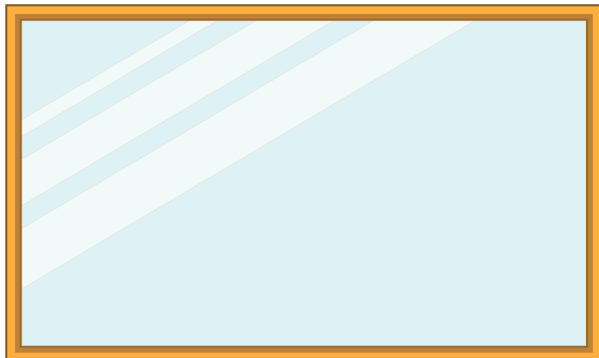
WHO IS HERE?

Draw or name the characters in this story.



LOOK IN THE MIRROR

Write or draw what you see people doing. Then circle what reminds you of yourself.



WHAT IS GOD DOING?

Write or draw what you discover about how God is meeting with people.