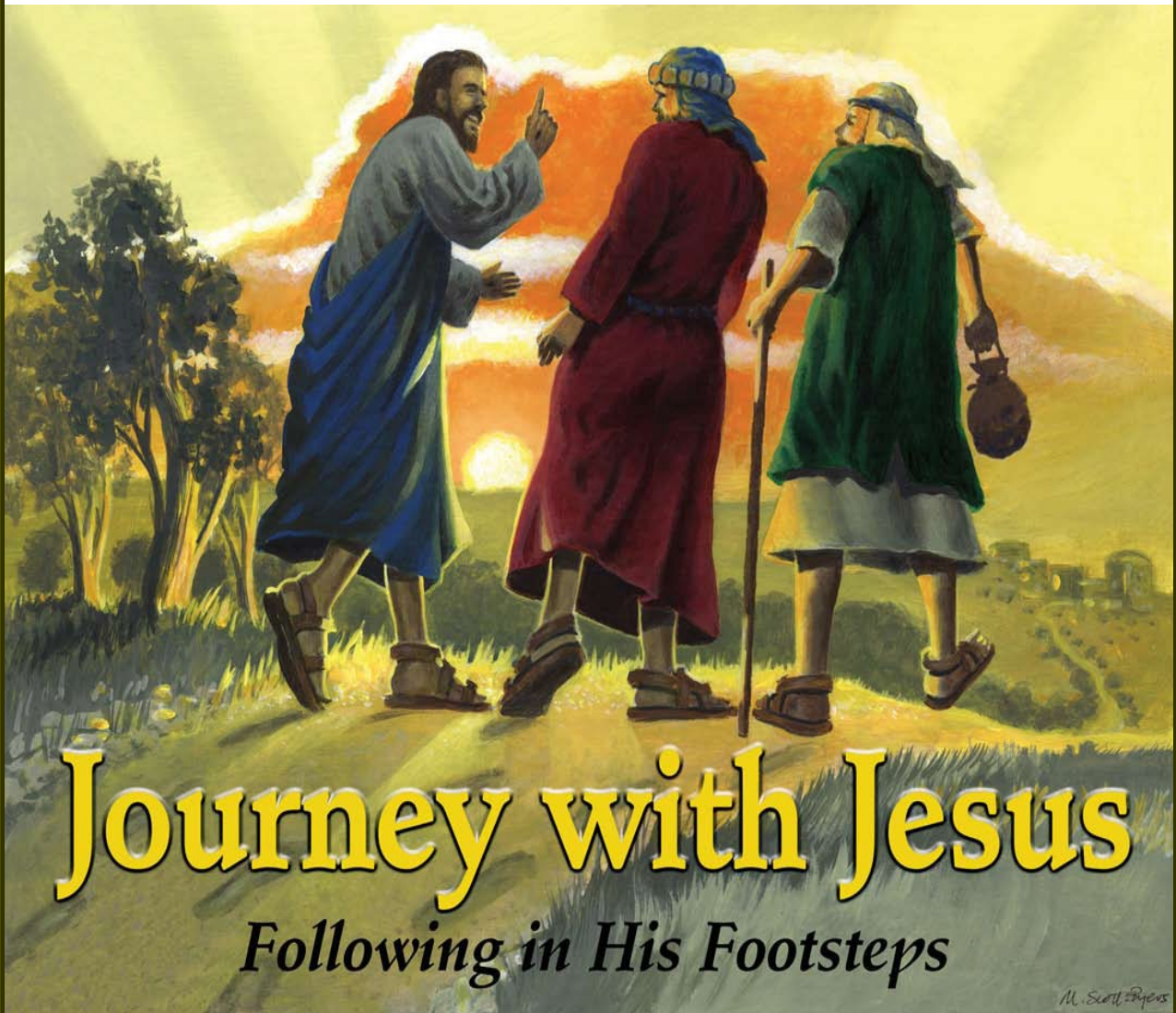


Early Childhood (Birth to Twelve Months)



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Vacation Bible School

Early Childhood (Birth to Twelve Months)

Journey with Jesus— Following in His Footsteps

Unit Overview	This unit focuses on Jesus growing as a child. Jesus' parents loved and obeyed God. The babies you teach are growing mentally, physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. What a great privilege to teach and love babies!
Bible Verse Phrases	Thank you, God, for baby Jesus (Luke 2:38). Jesus grew as a child (Luke 2:40, 52).
Learning Aim	To help babies know God loves them

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VBS Unit Overview for Babies

Sessions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
<p>Unit Title: Journey with Jesus—Following in His Footsteps</p>	<p><i>Journey Through the Marketplace</i> (Bible Learning Activities)</p> <p>Birth-to-Three Months:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to quiet music • Make photograph and footprint of each baby • Exercise arms and legs and sing • Look in a mirror • Enjoy musical socks
<p>Learning Aim: To help babies know God loves them</p>	
<p>Bible Verse Phrases: Thank you, God, for baby Jesus (Luke 2:38). Jesus grew as a child (Luke 2:40, 52).</p>	
<p>Bible Stories and Scripture References:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Jesus Was Born in Bethlehem Luke 2:1-7</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Thank You, God, for Jesus Luke 2:25-38</p> <p style="text-align: center;">God Took Care of Jesus and His Family Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Jesus Grew as a Child Luke 2:39-40, 52</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Jesus Learned About God at Church Luke 2:41-52</p>	<p>Four-to-Six Months:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use activities listed for birth-to-three months and add the following: • Play with jingle bell shakers • Play peek-a-boo with mirror • Play with vinyl or cardboard blocks
	<p>Seven-to-Twelve Months:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use activities listed for four-to-six months and add the following: • Listen to quiet music • Make photograph and footprint of each baby • Play with baby dolls

Journey with Jesus—Following in His Footsteps

Study the Bible

Session 1 Bible Background (Jesus Was Born in Bethlehem - Luke 2:1-7)

Tradition depicts Joseph leading or walking beside the donkey that carried Mary over the rough terrain. Mary and Joseph traveled from Nazareth in Galilee through Samaria to Bethlehem in Judea, a trip of about ninety miles or about five days' journey. A decree issued by the Roman government required Joseph to make the long, arduous trip to pay taxes. Mary evidently accompanied her husband-to-be because the birth of her baby was at hand. However, it was not accidental that Mary's baby would be born in Bethlehem. That is where the prophet Micah prophesied the Savior would be born (Micah 5:2). The village was known as "the city of David" because David had tended his father's sheep in that area (1 Samuel 17:15). It was where the prophet Samuel had anointed David king (1 Samuel 16:1-13). Since the town was near the main route between Jerusalem and Egypt, an inn had existed there from early times.

When the weary couple finally arrived in Bethlehem, they may have sought lodging in a home. Hospitality to guests, even strangers, was an important Jewish social function. Or, finding the inn had no room for them, they may have gone directly to an outlying cave. Habitable caves existed throughout the Bethlehem hills and were used as stables in ancient times.

No nursery, no special crib, and no fancy garments awaited the Savior's arrival. After Jesus was born, Mary would have laid him diagonally on a square of linen, folded the corners over him, and then wound the swaddling securely around him. Perhaps once a day for the next six months, she would wash him and gently rub him with olive oil or dust him with powder and then rewrap him with the long linen strips. The swaddling prevented the baby Jesus from thrashing his arms and legs. It was customary to so wrap babies for the first six months to ensure strong, straight bones.

Jesus' bed was the animals' stone feeding trough. Perhaps Mary cushioned it first with straw and then lined it with a goat hair blanket they used for covering at night.

Mary and Joseph may have taken turns singing sweet songs to their newborn baby. They loved him and must have tried to understand that the Son of God had been placed in their care.

Session 2 Bible Background (Thank You, God, for Jesus - Luke 2:25-38)

Forty days after Jesus' birth, Mary and Joseph made the five-mile trek north to the temple in Jerusalem. It was time for the rites of purification and sacrifice to be performed (see Leviticus 12:1-8).

The law required the firstborn son to be redeemed at a cost of five shekels in memory of God's sparing the firstborn of the Israelites at the time of the Exodus (see Numbers 18:14-16). The law

also required Mary to sacrifice two turtledoves, or pigeons, which Joseph probably purchased in the temple courtyard.

A wealthy man might have purchased a sheep for the sacrifice. As a carpenter, however, Joseph may have found even the expense of the two birds a hardship. When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple, it was probably swarming with hundreds of people. Among the mob were two special people—Simeon and Anna.

Simeon belonged to the class of humble and devout Jews who looked for the redemption of Israel. Consequently God shed abroad among the devout group the gift of prophecy and revealed truth to them that the scribes and Pharisees did not see. The Holy Spirit had assured Simeon that he would live to see the Promised One. Many years had passed. Simeon was now old. Every time a newborn baby boy was brought for dedication, he would probably wonder whether this child might be the hope of Israel.

Then one day, a couple brought their baby for the rites. When Simeon saw the infant, he took the baby in his arms and began praising God. The old man hailed the little baby as the gift from God, the Messiah. This baby would be a light to the entire world, a hint that Gentiles were included in God's plan for redemption. Further, Simon indicated that the child's future held heartbreak for Mary.

Similarly, the aged Anna belonged to the godly remnant who anticipated the Messiah. She listened to the reading of the scrolls and believed fully the prophecies they contained. Whether she was eighty-four years of age or had been a widow eighty-four years is unclear. Either way, the meaning is that she was elderly. She now spent her days in the temple fasting, praying, and looking for the Promised One.

Like Simeon, Anna may have lived with the constant expectation that tomorrow the Messiah would come. In God's perfect timing, the old woman entered just as Simeon lifted the baby and thanked God for God's faithfulness in letting him live to see God's Son. Suddenly Anna recognized the infant in Mary's arms and proclaimed the child as the Messiah. She told everyone who, like she and Simeon, anticipated Israel's redemption.

Both Simeon and Anna must have rejoiced that their years of waiting were over. They praised God and thanked him for letting them see Jesus.

Session 3 Bible Background (God Took Care of Jesus and His Family - Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23)

God's watchful eye was on his Son. As soon as the Wise Men left, Joseph received angelic instruction again. King Herod's anger was beyond control. The Wise Men had outwitted him when they left without letting him know where to find the new King. Herod's fury posed a threat for the baby born to be the Savior. Joseph as Jesus' legal father was responsible for his safety. Joseph followed the angel's instruction and immediately set out for Egypt.

A sizable number of Jews had lived in Egypt since the time of the exile, approximately 600 years before Jesus was born. Large concentrations of Jewish people lived in several large cities, but small Jewish communities were also established throughout Egypt. To reach Egypt, which was outside of Herod's jurisdiction, required a lengthy journey of several hundred miles across sun-baked desert wastes. Even in the company of a caravan, the trip was dangerous and tiring. The caravan probably took the route west of Bethlehem to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and then followed a coastal road to Egypt and safety.

Egypt had offered refuge to the Hebrews on other occasions. Abraham had gone there (Genesis 12:10), and Jacob and his descendants had lived there for an extended time (Gen. 46:20). Now Egypt promised protection for Jesus and his parents.

Perhaps in Egypt Joseph found work as a carpenter. When Herod died, a heavenly messenger instructed Joseph to return to Nazareth with his family.

Joseph seems to have assumed he should return to Judea. However, Archelaus, Herod's power-happy son, ruled the country. Archelaus was fully as treacherous as his father. Being warned in a dream, Joseph took his family back to Nazareth. Antipas, another of Herod's sons, ruled in Galilee. Jesus' reference to him as a "fox" (Luke 13:32) reveals something of his cunning nature. Herod Antipas was responsible for having John the Baptist beheaded (Mark 6:22-28).

Each time Joseph was instructed through a divine message, he promptly obeyed. The journey was hazardous, but God kept the family safe.

The whole experience—the flight to Egypt, the slaughter of innocent babies, the return to Galilee—fulfilled prophecies made by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:15) and Hosea (Hosea 11:1) many years earlier. God is not only faithful in keeping his promises; God also faithfully cares for his people.

Session 4 Bible Background (Jesus Grew as a Child - Luke 2:39-40, 52)

When Mary and Joseph returned to Nazareth from Egypt, they must have been happy to be reunited with their family and friends. They were probably relieved to be back in their home and Joseph's carpenter's shop. Nazareth was a good place for Jesus to live and grow up.

Since Jewish families enjoyed healthy foods, Jesus grew strong, likely on a nutritious diet of goat's milk and meat, fresh fruits, and breads made of wheat or barley. His vegetables were boiled or stewed and then seasoned with salt, onion, garlic, mint, or dill. To sweeten his food, Jesus would have used wild honey or syrups made by boiling down dates and grapes.

Jesus probably began helping Joseph in his carpenter's shop while he was a little boy. Today we tend to think of carpenters primarily as builders. In Jesus' time, though, many of the items used in everyday life were wooden, made by the village carpenter. Since all Jewish boys were taught a trade, Jesus may have served an apprenticeship with Joseph. Felling trees and then making the wood into useful items was strenuous work, but it was good exercise for a growing boy.

There were times when families and friends just enjoyed one another's company. Jesus may have joined other children in playing ball games. Toys might have included whistles, rattlers, wheeled animals, hoops, and spinning tops. As Jesus grew older, he may have joined the adults in playing various kinds of board games, including a game akin to checkers. In its own way, each form of recreation helped Jesus develop his mind and body.

Aramaic was the common language of the people, but Roman domination brought with it some use of Latin. Religious studies were conducted in Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament Scriptures. Since the trade routes that ran north and south of Nazareth resounded with numerous dialects and lesser tongues, trades people usually became accomplished linguists. Jesus may have learned to speak several languages.

Religious ceremonies and festivals were important facets of Jesus' family life. Mary and Joseph made regular pilgrimages to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. They probably took Jesus with them, even though only one such trip is recorded.

As Jesus grew from infancy to adolescence, he steadily matured physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Surely Mary and Joseph were pleased to watch Jesus grow. God also was very pleased with his Son's development in each stage of life.

Session 5 Bible Background (Jesus Learned About God at Church - Luke 2:41-52)

Jesus and his family were devout Jews. The family went to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the Passover. Passover celebrated God's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. The Passover celebration rekindled hope that God would send a Deliverer to Israel. When a Jewish boy reached the age of twelve years, custom prescribed that he be presented at the temple and take part in temple worship.

Most often the family and relatives would travel in a caravan to Jerusalem. The women and children led the procession followed by the men. A twelve-year-old boy could travel with either group. To go with a large group of other pilgrims, share the excitement and adventure of such a journey, and visit with relatives during the journey was an exhilarating experience.

During the Passover, rabbis and other scholars often assembled in the temple to discuss various matters. Discussing the promise of Messiah surely would have been one of their favorite topics.

When the week of the feast was over and the caravan started home, Mary and Joseph must have each assumed Jesus was in the company of the other since a twelve-year-old boy could travel with either the women or the men. Apparently on the evening of the first day's journey, Mary and Joseph discovered Jesus was with neither group. No doubt they spent a restless and anxious night. The next morning they journeyed all day back to Jerusalem to look for Jesus. Another tense night passed. The next day they found him in the temple. He was sitting in the midst of the learned men, talking with them and asking them questions. His inquiries were so insightful, the scholars were amazed at this understanding and his answers.

How relieved Mary and Joseph must have been to find him safe and in the company of the scholars. Yet a mother's reproach seemed in order (Luke 2:48). Jesus seemed puzzled that his parents did not know that he was in the temple and that they thus had not come straight to the temple to look for him (2:49). Jesus' response was not intended to be disrespectful. Rather it reflected a sense of his divine mission in the world and his unique relationship to God.

Mary and Joseph were astonished that their son had such understanding. They returned to Nazareth where Jesus continued to grow into an obedient, responsible youth.

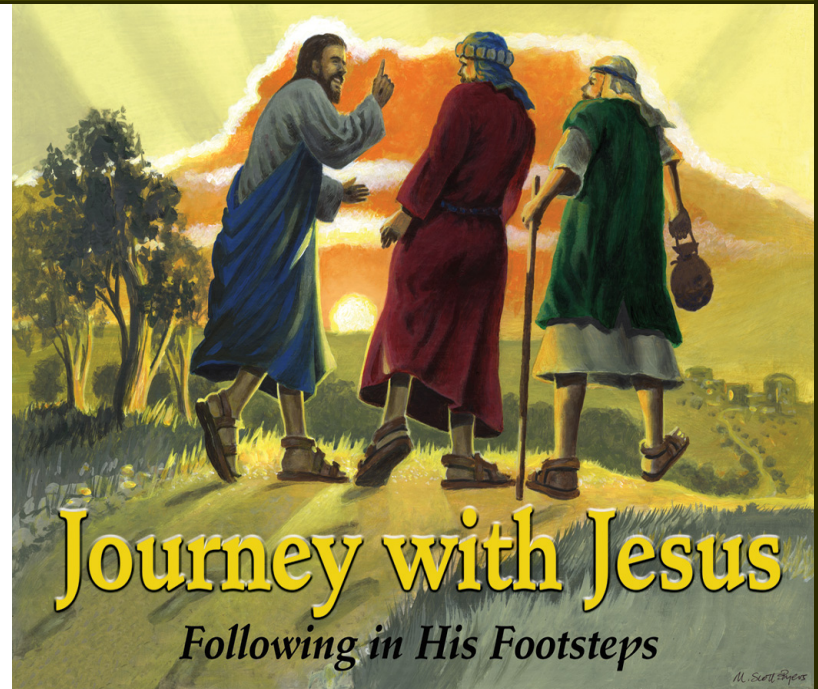
Journey Through the Marketplace **Bible Learning Activities for Babies**

Activities for Birth-to-Three Months:

- **Turn on quiet music.**
Play quiet music during the session.
- **Take a photograph and make a footprint of each child.**
Take a vertical photograph of each child. Print the *Journey with Jesus Booklet* on 8 ½" x 11" white copy paper. Make a two-sided copy with page one and two on white 8 ½" x 11" cardstock. Fold it in half. Glue or tape the picture on the left-hand page under the words "Jesus Loves." Use a foam paintbrush to paint a child's foot with any color of washable tempera or acrylic paint. Press it onto the right-hand side of the paper. Write the child's name and date of VBS on the front of the book.
- **Exercise the babies' arms and legs and sing "Thank You, God, for Baby Jesus."**
As you rock, change, feed, and exercise the babies' arms and legs, sing, "Thank You, God, for Baby Jesus" to the tune of "Mary Had a Little Lamb." Use the following words: *Thank you, God, for baby Jesus, baby Jesus, baby Jesus. Thank you, God, for baby Jesus. Oh I love you so.*
- **Look in a mirror and read a book.**
Position the mirror so the child can see himself/herself. As the child sees himself/herself in the mirror, say, *[Child's Name] is growing to be a big boy/girl just like Jesus. I love [Child's Name]. Jesus loves [Child's Name].* Read the book *I'm Growing Just Like Jesus (Resource Item 6)*.
- **Enjoy musical socks.**
Attach a jingle bell to a baby sock with heavy-duty thread. Place the sock on the child's foot. When the child moves or kicks, they will enjoy hearing the bell jingle. Move the child's hands and feet across the midline of her body as you sing, "If You're Happy and You Know It." Continue with the motions of the song.

Resource Item 5: Journey with Jesus Booklet

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Name _____

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Jesus loves

Resource Item 5: *Journey with Jesus* Booklet

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