

Jerusalem, Israel. >

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# The World Jesus Lived In

*Jesus the Nazarene*

## The Land Jesus Walked

You probably eat with knives, forks, and spoons, and not your fingers. Your parents will not be choosing a husband or wife for you. Some customs that you would find strange are perfectly normal for people in other times and countries. The way you live, your attitudes, and values are largely determined by the country and time in which you live. What else determines what you are like?

When the Son of God became man, he chose to live 2,000 years ago in a country in the Middle East called Palestine. The United States is more than 230 years old, but consider how life has changed since the time of George Washington. Imagine then the difference between the world that shaped Jesus and your world. Knowing about life during his time will help you understand Jesus and the Gospels.

During Jesus' time, Palestine was as large as Vermont and had three main areas: Galilee in the north, Samaria, and Judea in the south. (To remember the order of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, think "God Sent Jesus.") Nazareth, a town in the hills of Galilee, was the place where Jesus grew up. During his public ministry, his home base was Capernaum, a town near the Sea of Galilee. Jesus' life began in Bethlehem and ended in Jerusalem, both in Judea.

Galilee is mountainous and beautiful. The Sea of Galilee (also called Lake Gennesareth) is to

the east, and Mount Hermon is to the north. Although most of Galilee was rural during Jesus' time, major trade routes passed through its large trading cities.

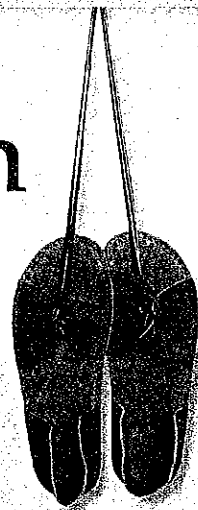
Greek and Roman culture were popular in Galilee. Many Galilean Jews were originally of non-Jewish origin. For this reason, Judeans looked down on Galileans.

Samaria was avoided by Jewish people when they traveled. The Samaritans were considered heretics because they had intermarried with foreigners and worshiped in their own temple on Mount Gerizim instead of at the Temple in Jerusalem.

Judea is a dry, hot land. The Dead Sea is to the east, and wilderness is to the south. Jerusalem was the capital city where Israel's kings had lived. It was also the holy city because the Temple was there. Jerusalem is sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

To the west of Palestine is the Mediterranean Sea. Within Palestine the Jordan River flows south through the Sea of Galilee and into the Dead Sea.

When Jesus lived, towns in Palestine were surrounded by walls. Food and crafts were sold in markets just outside the walls. Every night the city gates were locked, and guards kept watch.





◀ The Western Wall in Jerusalem.

## The Political Scene

When Jesus lived, Palestine was occupied by Rome, which had conquered it in 63 B.C. During Jesus' lifetime, Augustus Caesar and then his stepson, Tiberius Caesar, were the Roman emperors. Herod the Great was king of Palestine until shortly after Jesus' birth. Although he was a great builder and rebuilt the Temple, he is remembered most for his cruelty. He killed many of his family for fear that they would overthrow his rule. After his death, Palestine was divided among his three sons: Archelaus, Herod Antipas, and Philip. Archelaus ruled Judea and Samaria until Augustus replaced him with Roman procurators such as Pontius Pilate, who sentenced Jesus to death. Herod Antipas, whom Jesus called "the fox," ruled Galilee. Philip ruled the region east of Galilee.

In general, Rome respected Jewish religious practices. Jewish men, for instance, did not have to serve in the army because their religion did not permit them to mix with **Gentiles**, or non-Jews. However, the Jewish people resented the presence of Roman troops, Roman laws, and Roman taxes. Jewish men who collected taxes for Rome were the least popular men in town. These tax collectors, also called publicans, were allowed

to keep any money they collected beyond their quota.

## Some Religious Groups

The **Pharisees** were largely middle-class Jews. They were known for their love of the Torah, or the Law, the first five books of the Bible. Some schools

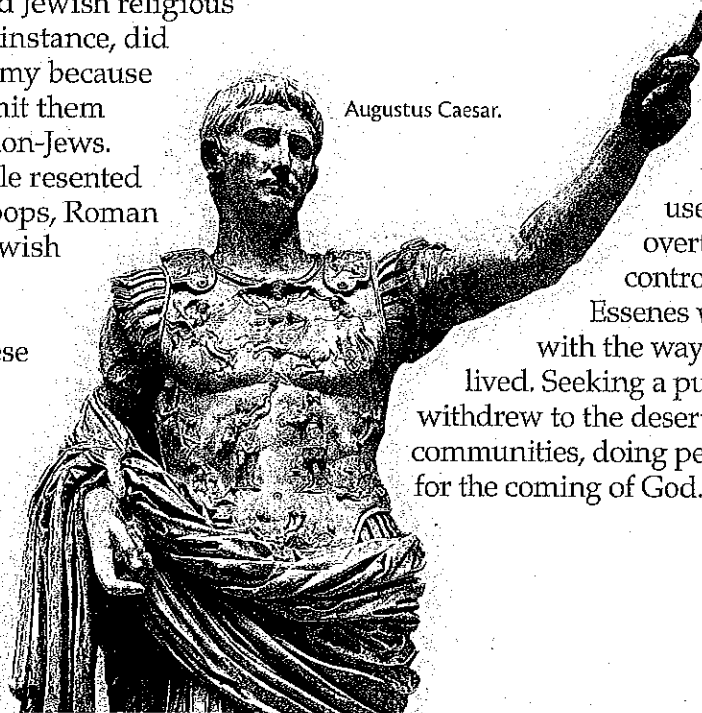
of Pharisees interpreted the Law strictly and added 613 regulations. The Pharisees believed in angels and in our resurrection. The Gospels show Jesus scolding some of them for stressing external observances instead of a spirit of love and worship. The Pharisees, however, were sincerely seeking holiness. They preserved the Jewish religion after Jerusalem was destroyed by Rome in A.D. 70. The scholarly teachers among the Pharisees were called scribes.

The Sadducees were wealthy and powerful political leaders. Most were priests. They worked closely with Rome and, unlike the Pharisees, did not believe in resurrection or in adding to the Law. The Sanhedrin was a group of 71 Jewish men in Judea who served as a supreme council. The chief high priest presided over it. He was not only a spiritual leader but almost a king. Caiaphas was the high priest at the end of Jesus' life, assisted by

his father-in-law, Annas.

Zealots were freedom fighters who sometimes used violence to overthrow Rome's control of Palestine. The

Essenes were men unhappy with the way Jewish faith was lived. Seeking a pure life, many withdrew to the desert. There they lived in communities, doing penance and waiting for the coming of God.



Augustus Caesar.

## Jesus' Religion

Jesus was Jewish. Jewish families prayed many prayers together at home. They prayed before and after eating. Morning and evening they prayed the Shema, the main commandment:

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God,  
the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love  
the LORD, your God, with all your heart,  
and with all your soul, and with all  
your strength.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

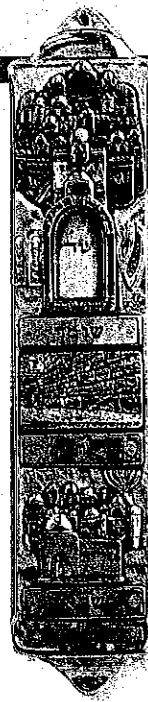
### A Moment with Jesus

Pause for a moment and silently read the Scripture passage above. Imagine Jesus learning this prayer and praying it each day. Take a moment to reflect on how you express your belief in God each day. Ask Jesus to help you love God with all your heart, soul, and strength.

On entering and leaving a house, Jewish people touched the mezuzah. It was a small case on the right post of a doorway that held a copy of the Shema. At prayer, devout men put a prayer shawl on their heads and strapped small boxes (phylacteries) to their foreheads and arms. These boxes contained the Word of God. People greeted one another by saying *shalom*, which means "peace."

Everyone who was able traveled to the Temple in Jerusalem to observe the three major feasts: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. The Temple, the symbol of the Jewish faith, was the only place where sacrifices were offered. It was a huge and majestic building. Twenty men were needed to open one of its thirteen gates. Twenty thousand people worked there. During Jesus' time, the Temple was undergoing an expansion ordered by Herod the Great. In

Maurice Denis, *Jesus Christ, Mary and Joseph*, early 20th century. >



< Mezuzah.

A.D. 70, Rome attacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. All that was left standing was an outer western wall that still exists today. At this wall, called the Western Wall, Jewish people pray and grieve over the destruction of the Temple. They insert prayer petitions between the giant stones.

Sabbath, the Lord's Day, was a day of strict rest. Among forbidden activities were tying a rope, putting out a lamp, and walking more than a half mile. Sabbath services were held at local synagogues. These were the centers of prayer, education, and social life in the towns. The scrolls of the Torah were read and preached there.

The Law declared what made a person unclean or unfit for worship. Actions such as touching a sick or dead person and dealing with Gentiles required special prayers, washings, or passage of time before the person became clean.



## Daily Life in Palestine

Imagine that you lived in Palestine when Jesus did. Your house is made of clay bricks or stones held together with mud and straw. Its one room has a dirt floor. At night, you sleep on a mat on the dirt floor. Your pillow is a piece of wood or a stone. In hot weather, you climb the outside steps up to the roof to sleep. The roof is made of sticks bound by long grass and covered with earth. In your house are a table, a spinning wheel, and a wooden bowl for measuring grain. Since there are no windows, an olive-oil lamp burns all day on a stand. At the far end of your house, a cave shelters your goat and donkey.

You probably belong to a large family. Your father is a farmer, a craftsman, or a fisherman. He has a beard and large brown eyes. He wears a sleeveless gown covered by a long tunic that is fringed at the bottom and tied with a belt. A white cloth on his head is held in place by a cord. A heavy cloak made of camel



hair or goat hair serves him as a coat or a blanket. He leads the family prayers. You and your mother are considered his property.

Your mother cooks outside, grinding grain and baking bread. She wears a decorated tunic and sandals, and she never goes out without a veil over her face. She looks forward to her daily walk to the town well. There she meets and chats with other women before carrying home her water jug on her head. Your mother is not allowed to know how to read or write, but she memorizes Scripture from the synagogue service.



If you are a boy, you go to synagogue school. There a rabbi teaches you to read and write by studying Scripture. Your father teaches you his trade. If you are a girl, your mother prepares you to be a good wife. You hope to have many sons. Your parents will arrange a marriage for you. You might not see your husband until your wedding day.

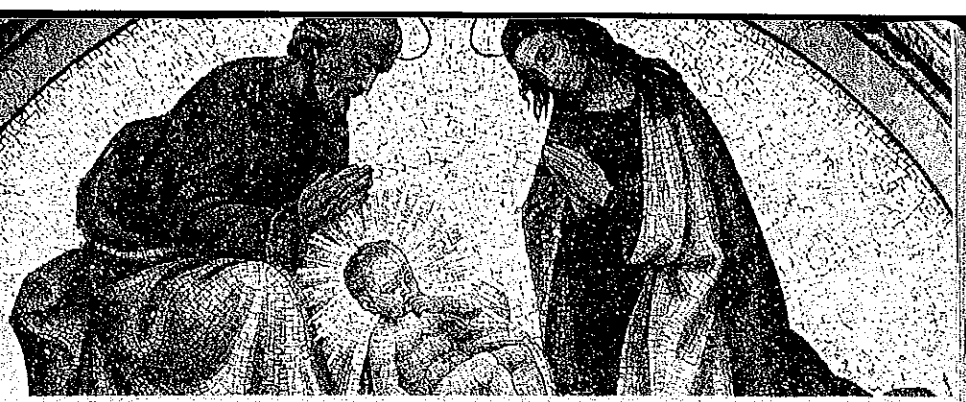
You do not attend public entertainment because the Gentiles are there. Your life revolves around prayer and religious celebrations, especially those that mark stages of life. Weddings can last seven days. For funerals, even poor people hire flute players and mourners for a procession to the stone tombs.

You eat twice a day while sitting cross-legged outside on the ground. Instead of a fork or spoon, you use your hands. Besides bread, your meals include honey, spiced foods, cheese, vegetables, fruit, and fish. You seldom have meat or eggs. Water and wine are the usual drinks.

You probably speak Aramaic, but you also know some Hebrew for prayer and perhaps some Greek, which is the language of the land.

◀ James Tissot, *The Presentation of Christ in the Temple*, 1886-1894, watercolor.

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# The Early Life of Jesus

*Jesus the Son of Mary and Joseph*

## Stories of an Infant God

What does Christmas mean to you?

If Jesus had not died and risen, we would have nothing to celebrate at Christmas. But Jesus did rise, showing himself to be the Son of God, our Savior. That is why we celebrate his birthday. The first Christians, however, did not. The recent astounding events of his death and Resurrection were uppermost in their minds. As time went on, Christians wondered about Jesus' origins and early life. Soon stories were circulating.

Stories about Jesus' birth and early life are in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. They are called **Infancy Narratives**. The evangelists wrote them in a way that shows who Jesus was. They present the mystery of his coming through beautiful and miraculous events:

- The Annunciation—Jesus' conception in Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit
- The Visitation—the recognition of his presence by Elizabeth and John
- The Nativity—Jesus' birth
- The Presentation—the offering of Jesus to God in the Temple

Biblical scholars have theories about the Infancy Narratives. For instance, they discuss who the magi were and whether the story is historical or symbolic. It does not matter if

there were three kings or not. The Church teaches that the Scriptures contain the truth that is necessary for us to know for our salvation. This is called **inerrancy**. The all-important truth in the Infancy Narratives is that Jesus came to save us.

At Jesus' birth around 4 B.C., there was no video equipment to capture the events. Maybe Mary told Luke the stories of Jesus' birth. Maybe the evangelists added events and symbols to make a point or to fulfill prophecies. What we do know is that the Infancy Narratives are God's Word. They proclaim the meaning of who Jesus is for us.

## Mini-Gospels

The Infancy Narratives are known as the "Gospels in miniature" because they tell the same Good News as the whole Gospels. They show all the aspects of Jesus' love. They reveal Jesus' identity, his mission, the role of the Holy Spirit in his life, Jesus' concern for all, his suffering, and his rejection. The main message of the narratives is the same as the Easter message: *Jesus is Lord, the Son of God who saved us*. That message is proclaimed in many ways. As you review the stories, listen for it and for other messages God may be sending you.

## An Album of Jesus

Each picture in this album matches a story from the Infancy Narratives. Look up the Scripture citations and read the verses. Then write a title for the picture.



1. Luke 1:26–28



2. Matthew 1:18–25



3. Luke 1:36, 39–56



4. Luke 2:1–20



5. Matthew 2:1–12



6. Matthew 2:13–15



7. Luke 2:22–38



8. Luke 2:41–52

## Gospel Truths

The Infancy Narratives contain the following Gospel truths. Think of each story identified above and write its number in front of any truth it conveys. Be ready to explain your answers.

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. Jesus is God, so extraordinary signs accompany his birth.
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. Mary, the mother of God, is someone special.
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. Jesus is the Messiah.
- \_\_\_\_\_ d. Jesus is sent by the Father.
- \_\_\_\_\_ e. The Holy Spirit acts for our salvation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ f. Jesus is Savior of all people, not only Jewish people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ g. Some people reject Jesus.
- \_\_\_\_\_ h. Jesus suffers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ i. Jesus comes for the poor and the outcast.



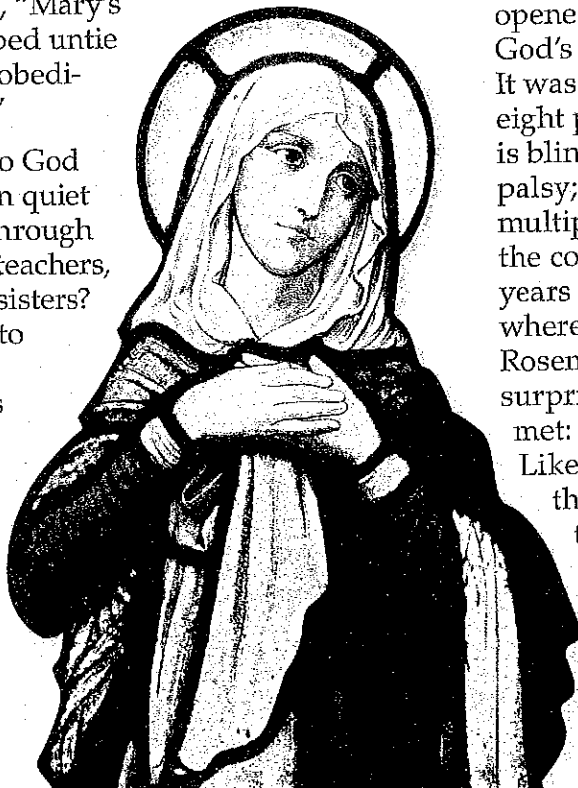
## Mary, a Listener

The heroine of the Infancy Narratives is Mary, a woman who was always open to God. By her faith, expressed when she answered yes, Mary became the mother of Jesus. Because Jesus is God, Mary is *Theotokos*, or the **Mother of God**. When the Son of God became the Son of Mary, he took the substance of his flesh from her. Jesus bore her features. He lived with her for about 30 years. She made his clothes, cooked his food, and taught him to walk and talk. He took care of her, obeyed her, and loved her. She witnessed his growth, his joys and sorrows, and his prayer. She knew his smile, the touch of his hand, and his thoughts and feelings. Forever he will call her Mother.

Mary listened to God, which led to action. She was prepared to risk all she had for love of God. She responded to Gabriel, "Let it be," (*fiat*) calling herself God's handmaid. She willingly became the Mother of the Redeemer, a dangerous and painful mission. After the Annunciation, Mary did not just sit and think about herself. She went to help Elizabeth. At all times, she cooperated with the work of her Son, even when it meant standing at the foot of the cross.

Mary's "Let it be" echoed God's "Let it be" that began creation. She made possible the new creation that Christ brought about. As Saint Irenaeus put it, "Mary's obedience helped untie what Eve's disobedience had tied."

Do you *listen* to God speak to you in quiet prayer time? through your parents, teachers, brothers, and sisters? Do you listen to your friends' needs? to calls to share your money or time with the poor? Do you *act*?



It is said that Mary bore Jesus in her heart before she bore him in her womb. How can you be a Christ-bearer today?

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We believe that because Mary is the Mother of God, she was given special gifts. These privileges of Mary are Catholic **doctrines**.

- The Immaculate Conception—Mary was never in the state of sin, neither original sin, nor personal sin.
- The Virgin Birth—Mary conceived Jesus solely through the power of the Holy Spirit. (We believe she was always a virgin.)
- The Assumption—Mary went to heaven body and soul at the end of her life.

## A Modern Mary

After raising four children, Rosemary Koenig felt God calling her to serve others. With little money and at the age of 65 she opened the Shelter of God's Love in Chicago.

It was a home for eight people with disabilities like Pam, who is blind; Margie, a young girl with cerebral palsy; and Evelyn, a grandmother who has multiple sclerosis. Each evening after dinner, the community prayed for the world. A few years later, Rosemary started another Shelter where senior citizens could live together. Rosemary trusted God for everything. In surprising ways, the Shelters' needs were met: a van, a computer, an assistant director. Like Mary, Rosemary listened to God and then acted. She let God do great things through her. Rosemary died in 2005 at the age of 92.



## Honoring Mary

Throughout the centuries, the Church has honored Mary. The early Church saw her as the new Eve. Eve was disobedient to God; Mary obeyed God with her whole heart and soul. By her "Let it be," she helped to renew our relationship with God, our Father.

During the centuries of the Middle Ages, from about 900 to 1500, Mary became even more important to Christians. Europe was going through difficult times with wars and sickness. In these times, Mary was seen as a tender and caring Mother of Mercy, whose concern was to help her children into heaven.

The people felt that they had a special friend in Mary. God chose his mother not from the palaces of kings and queens, but from a quiet, small village. Mary was a young girl from a humble family. She was honored with the title of Queen of Heaven and Refuge of Sinners.

During the Middle Ages, many cathedrals were built in Europe and named after Mary. She was celebrated in poetry, hymns, prayers, and sermons. Mary's Assumption into heaven was especially celebrated. Since Mary is the Mother of Christ, it was only fitting that after her time on earth she would be assumed body and soul into heaven.

There are many examples of appearances Mary has made to help people and to encourage them to pray.

### Our Lady of Guadalupe

In 1521 Mary appeared to Juan Diego in Mexico. She told him that

Our Lady of Guadalupe.



she wanted a church built in her honor. When Juan Diego brought her request to his bishop, the bishop asked for a sign. In response to the bishop's request, Mary filled Juan Diego's cloak with roses. When Juan Diego opened the cloak for the bishop, they discovered the beautiful image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the cloak. This image is still on display in Mexico and is visited by thousands of pilgrims every year.

### Our Lady of Lourdes

In 1858 Mary appeared to Bernadette Soubirous, a girl from a poor family in France. Bernadette



St. Bernadette of Lourdes.

received 18 messages from Our Lady in the grotto of Lourdes. Mary proclaimed to Bernadette that she was the Immaculate Conception. The teaching of the Church is that Mary was conceived without original sin. Obediently following the instructions of Mary, Bernadette

discovered a spring that proved to be a source of miraculous healing. Since that time, millions of people have visited Lourdes. Many continue to visit today to honor Mary and to pray for healing.

Those are just a few examples of the importance of Mary. She is remembered not only in the Infancy Narratives, but as someone who continues to intercede for us, her children, today.

## A Moment with Jesus

God chose Mary, a young girl from a poor family, to be the Mother of God. Pause and think about this for a moment.

Her yes to God is an example for us. Take a moment and ask Jesus to show you how you are being called to say yes to God at this time in your life. Thank Jesus for the gift of Mary to the Church.