

# INCARNATION

## FLESHING OUT THE BIBLE'S CHRISTMAS STORIES

**A YALE BIBLE STUDY**  
with Allen Hilton

### Our Process

In a Zoom time we will be Zoom people. Yale Divinity School Continuing Education director, Kelly Morrissey, will host us. Here's how we'll do our time together.

- We'll meet at 8 PM Eastern Time Monday evenings Nov 30<sup>th</sup>, Dec 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup>.
- I'll present for 45-50 minutes, after which I'll field questions from Zoom chat.
- We'll finish at 9 PM with the official class time. Feel free to move on to the rest of your evening.
- For any who wish to hang out on Zoom 9:00-9:30 to talk, I'd love to hear more questions, comments
- Midday each Monday, you'll receive,
  - an e-mail reminder of that evening's class,
  - a Zoom link and
  - a resend of that evening's Prep Guide (in case you missed it).
- Midday each Wednesday, you'll receive
  - the prep guide for the NEXT Monday's class,
  - the podcast from the LAST Monday's class, and
  - access to all the podcasts and prep guides from prior weeks.

If you have questions you don't feel comfortable asking on chat in class or ones that come after we've parted, please e-mail them to me (Allen Hilton) at [allen@houseunitedmovement.org](mailto:allen@houseunitedmovement.org).

This study is an original new one that will add to the tremendous library of resources Kelly and friends have built on the Yale Bible Study website. Please avail yourself of that rich storehouse of courses and materials!

If you have any trouble joining the first Zoom call, please let us know by e-mailing Kelly at [kelly.morrissey@yale.edu](mailto:kelly.morrissey@yale.edu).

## Our Schedule

Here's your map to the four weeks. I've included a description of the session topics, the part of the Bible we'll look at together, and some questions you might want to ask as you read. PLEASE KNOW THAT NO PREPARATION WILL BE REQUIRED. If you have time and want to prep for our time together, the questions are intended to focus your reading. With that in mind, here's our path.

30NOV20      Come Thou Unexpected Jesus (Matthew 1.1—3.17)

*In this session, we will read the famous story of Jesus' birth in 1.18-25 in the context of Matthew's larger purpose of "Preparing the Way" for Jesus' public appearance in chapter 4. The episodes will include*

- *the genealogy (1.1-17)*
- *the visit of the Magi (2.1-12)*
- *the atrocity of Herod (2.13-18)*
- *the message of John the Baptist (3.1-17)*
- *the question of John from Herod's dungeon (11.1-15)*

*We'll compare the expectations these episodes present to the actual Jesus who shows up in Galilee.*

Thoughts for Preparation:

- Read through Matthew 1.1—3.17. Rivet your attention on what each section expects Jesus will be.
- Read Matthew 11.1-15. Ask how John's expectations compare to the reality Jesus brings.
- The Prep Guide is designed to come in behind that reading to add nuance.

07DEC20      Savior of the World (Luke 1.1—3.38)

*Luke's baby Jesus projects to have serious range! A decree of the Emperor of the World, Caesar Augustus, forces Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem on a crowded winter night, with no room at the inn. Caesar doesn't stop to look in, of course, and dignitaries give it a pass as well. In fact, lowly dung-covered shepherds are the only audience at this birth. Yet angels announce over tiny Bethlehem, "City of David", that shepherds' eyes are witnessing "a Savior, which is the Messiah, the Lord" and One who will bring "peace on earth, goodwill to all". A chapter later, Luke will trace Jesus' lineage and significance back beyond David and Abraham to Adam and Eve. By the time Luke is done, word about this Savior will have reached Athens and Rome. Born in a backwater barn, then, Jesus will be a king whose reign is boundless.*

Preparation:

- Read through Luke 1.1—3.38 looking for the size of the stage Jesus will play on. What rulers are named? What ancestors are traced?
- Keep an eye, also, on the social class of Jesus versus the powerful ones who form the furniture of Luke’s opening. Mary will “Magnificate” that comparison and its impact, the family will choose the low-income option when they sacrifice, and John the Baptist will charge his baptizands to split their stuff with those who need.

14DEC20 God Incognito (John 1.1-18)

*In all the great espionage movies, spies use code and secret gestures to communicate who they are. “How will I recognize you?” says one. “I’ll wear a red carnation in my lapel,” says the other; or “I’ll knock with three loud, two soft, one loud.” Sometimes they even wear disguises. When the immortal God, creator of all that is, ruler over heaven and earth, decides to visit the people he has made, he slips on a costume, too: flesh. And so, the mystery of John’s Gospel is set: how do we know which flesh holds God? In this third session, we’ll see if we can – sleuthing out clues from John – break the divine code and suss out what God looks like in flesh.*

Preparation:

- Read the great prologue of John’s Gospel (1.1-18).
- What are John’s claims about this Word?
- Read John 20.30-31 and ask yourself how John plans to let people know which is the Word’s flesh.

21DEC20 Love Came Down (Philippians 2; Colossians 3; Hebrews 1, etc.)

*The fun of incarnation does not stop when the Gospels end, of course. In this session we’ll widen our scope to the whole New Testament – maybe even glance forward to what later Christian councils will make of all this. We’ll fill in your preparation options for session in the Prep Guide for our third session.*

**Final Thought**

We will discover that “The Bible Stories of Christmas” move well beyond the cast of creche characters and pageant people. I hope you will enjoy this wide-angle lens through which we will observe the mystery of incarnation!