

Join the children in the circle and announce the title of the story. Read aloud pages 192–199 from *The Jesus Storybook Bible* or listen to CD2 track 10.

Notes for Teachers on the Text

Legends and myths from all over the world are filled with stories of a great king who used to rule and someday may return. For example, Robin Hood is based on that idea – when the good king was present, the kingdom was fine; now everything is awful because the king is gone; but someday, the king will come again. J. R. R. Tolkien drew on that same theme when he wrote *The Return of the King*. Then there is King Arthur, whose tombstone, according to legend, read: Here lies Arthur, the once and future king.

In the late 1920s, Tolkien, who was a Christian and a professor at Oxford University, was walking with his friend C. S. Lewis, also a professor at Oxford, but at that time an atheist. Tolkien was trying to explain to Lewis the significance of the fact that he loved old tales about such kings. Lewis believed the myths and stories were just that – fairy tales and myths, and yet, he too admitted he was deeply moved by them.

Tolkien had a theory. He believed that even though the legends and stories are not true in the sense of being factually and historically true, they are actually getting at underlying realities. First, they all say that this world is under an evil spell and our problems are not going to be dealt with by our own efforts, because a sorcerer or somebody has got us under a spell. Second, these stories point to the fact that the material, physical world is not all there is. There is a supernatural and spiritual realm, not just a material realm. Third, these stories say that we need sacrificial love to save us; we are not going to be able to do it ourselves.

Tolkien said all human beings know the universe is really like that, which is the reason why – although technically you may not believe them – the legends and stories move you. Tolkien posited that when you listen to a fairy tale, it moves you, because at the very end there is a “miraculous grace,” what Tolkien called a “eucatastrophe” – victory out of the jaws of defeat, usually at infinite cost to someone else. (See J. R. R. Tolkien’s “On Fairy-Stories.”)

Lewis thought the theory interesting, but he told Tolkien that all the old myths, all the old stories are lies. Tolkien disagreed and then he asked: “How about this story? The world is under an evil spell, but God sends his Son into the world and he is born in the most unlikely place, a manger. He takes on the evil forces socially and culturally and spiritually. He takes on the oppressive powers and principalities in this world, the Romans and the Pharisees, and he takes on the demons. And finally, on the cross, when it looks like evil has defeated him, he is raised from the dead. And he is bringing together a band of people and renewing their lives, and someday, he is going to renew the whole world.”

Lewis said he had never heard the Christian story told like that, but admitted that Tolkien was right, it is just like all the other stories – it is another one of those stories that points to these underlying realities. Tolkien said, “No! Jesus Christ is the underlying reality to which all the stories point.” It is different, because Jesus’ story is not just a story. This story became historical; this story became a fact. Jesus Christ was born.