

JANUARY 7-13, 2019

Luke 2; Matthew 2

We Have Come to Worship Him

Summary: *Heavenly messengers herald the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem—He is circumcised, and Simeon and Anna prophesy of His mission—At twelve years of age, He goes about His Father’s business.*

The wise men are directed by a star to Jesus—Joseph takes the child to Egypt—Herod slays the children in Bethlehem—Jesus is taken to Nazareth to dwell.

**Supplemental
Jewish and
Holy Land
Insights**

I live right next to Bethlehem. The sheep and shepherds are my neighbors. I have experienced visiting

Bethlehem and the nearby hillsides close to seven hundred times. To me, it is like stepping into a time warp. Things are so similar to the land Jesus knew. Therefore, I will include an excerpt from my book, **ISRAEL REVEALED**, to give some added insights to this lesson.

BETHLEHEM

Today many people travel to the Holy Land to look for Jesus in traditional spots. They expect a stable behind an inn. They come looking for scenes they learned from Christmas cards. Their traditional perceptions come from the West. Let’s draw our attention to the East where it really happened. First, let’s examine the traditional site. One foreign broadcast correspondent once commented about his Christmas visit in Israel. He said that Bethlehem should be spelled, B-E-D-L-A-M. The conflict, chaos, and confusion of that Christmas Day were not what he had expected. After that we can examine the

not-so-well-known site, where sheep and shepherds still roam on the hillsides of Bethlehem.

The Nativity Church: The traditionally accepted birthplace of Jesus is in a grotto located under the Church of Nativity. A grotto or cave is probable because stables were usually on the ground floor or underneath the inn rooms. Ancient inns were usually caravan stops. People were accustomed to “camping.” There were a few private rooms—not at all like today’s Holiday Inns. The traditional site for Jesus’ birthplace was established only 175 years after His birth. Three Christian churches, the Greek Orthodox, Armenian, and Catholic, hold separate services here and maintain a star decorating the place of birth.

Mixed Ownership of the Church: Ownership is tentative, at best. The three churches rotate their rights in using the grotto. Each church’s priests, in turn, bring their own decorative accouterments, adornments, carpets, and curtains to be used during their particular mass or service. After that they must remove all of their items, relinquishing the temporary ownership during their mass to the next religious group. In the past there have been considerable conflicts over these

ownership rights. In 1989 a change was made among the Armenian priests. An Australian, Father Nursis, came to direct the Armenian Bethlehem facility. A good-natured man, he went directly to the Greek Orthodox and Catholic prelates and made friends. He has reconciled centuries of conflict. For example, the fight over ownership of a wall separating their two chapels has been resolved. Previously, regular headlines around Christmas time would read, "Annual Christmas brawl breaks out at Bethlehem church." This seems to have been settled, mostly through the efforts of a friendly and faithful visiting priest. As of now, his temporary visit seems to be turning into a permanent stay in the Holy Land.

Manger Square and Mosques: During Christmas week the square is full of bleachers for various visiting choral groups. Shops and the few trees nearby are festively decorated; the mosque is not. Opposite or close to every Christian church in this Holy Land is a Moslem mosque; and Bethlehem's Manger Square is no exception. Also, across the street are the local police station and souvenir shops. New television antennas stretch up from the aged housetops. The skyline picture is surely a contrast to what the village of Bethlehem must have looked like twenty centuries ago. Let's go back to that time.

Ruth and Naomi in Bethlehem: Around Bethlehem are numerous hills still grazed by sheep and goats. In the spring, the small fields, supported by terraces, are planted with wheat or barley. It was to these hills that the widows Naomi and Ruth returned from Moab. Ruth gathered after the reapers; her good fortune was to come to the fields of Boaz, who was a relative of Naomi's late husband, Elimelech.

"And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons.

And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth . . .

And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them;

. . . she went forth out of the place where she was, . . .

And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.

And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me. . . .

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess . . . and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest." (Ruth 1:3-22)

Ruth married Boaz and had a son named Obed. Obed had a son named Jesse, who tended flocks and crops in these same hills. It is still the Middle-East custom for the husband's family to care for the late husband's widowed wife. What Boaz did was culturally proper, and it certainly blossomed into a sweet love story.

"And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth . . . and his name was Boaz. . . .

And Ruth . . . gleaned in the field after the reapers: And her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech. . . .

Then said Boaz unto Ruth . . . abide here fast by my maidens . . .

Then she . . . said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, . . . seeing I am a stranger?

And Boaz answered . . . a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.” (Ruth 2:1-12)

The Lineage of Kings: A genetic line begins as he marries Ruth, a foreign convert, and that set the stage for a line of kings.

“So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife . . . and she bare a son. . . . And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it. And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.” (Ruth 4:13, 16-17)

King David: Jesse’s youngest son was named David. In obscurity during his childhood he was ordained the king of Israel. Yet he continued to be a shepherd; surely he was a good shepherd. Born at Bethlehem he was promised by God that his seed would bring the King of Kings, the Messiah—also to be known as the Good Shepherd.

“I am the good shepherd: The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11)

A Latter-day David: The old David proved himself politically, militarily, and spiritually. In spite of his sinfulness later in his life, Israelis still sing about the old David, King of Israel, awaiting a new Davidic descendant. Virtually every Bar Mitzvah celebration is enhanced by singing to the Jewish lad being honored. He is treated as an expected David, one that should come in latter-days, out of obscurity, to reestablish a righteous kingdom. Christians feel that the Davidic prophecies began to be fulfilled when the

Davidic kingdom was partially restored in the meridian of time with the coming of Jesus of Nazareth. They do expect the rest of the fulfillment to come later.

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.” (Isaiah 9:6-7)

In considering the words of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea, the Jewish expectation of a latter-day David seems to include a person similar to the ancient David in addition to the Davidic Messiah, the King of Kings. He may also come out of obscurity.

“But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them.” (Jeremiah 30:9)

“And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it.” (Ezekiel 34:24)

“Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.” (Hosea 3:5)

If ancient events are any kind of pattern for the future, the latter-day David may be like the ancient David. He probably will prove himself politically, militarily, and spiritually. The people may then want to proclaim him a king. However, he will not

likely accept that kingship. Although honored as a prince or a noble person, he will introduce and bear witness of the King of Kings. He came in the meridian of time and will return in the latter-days.

THE KING OF KINGS

A simple story that comes out of obscurity is the introduction of the Davidic descendant, the King of Kings.

Born During Passover: Again it was the Passover season, spring of that year. (There was no month with the name of April when Jesus was born). According to the biblical calendar, Passover always occurs on the first full moon after the first day of spring. By the way, April 6, 1830 is the date The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized. It was also the first full moon after the first day of spring. It was Passover,

“ . . . being one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh . . . ”

(Doctrine & Covenants 20:1)

The Deliverer was born during the season that celebrates the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and also the expectation of an even greater deliverance. The two deliverances are linked by a journey of time through two millennia.

The Journey to Bethlehem: The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem had taken at least a week to ten days.

“And it came to pass in those days, . . . that Joseph and his espoused wife went . . . unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem . . .” **(Luke 2:1-4)**

Bethlehem was their destination because they were of the house and lineage of David. They may have been staying with relatives for some time, for the scripture reads,

“A . . . And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.” **(Luke 2:6-7)**

Angels and Shepherds: Nearby, shepherds watched over their flocks, and angels announced good tidings.

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. . . . Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.” **(Luke 2:11-12)**

Twenty centuries later we feel that we may know some of those angels. Were we there? Was Naomi also happily singing? In her life she was bitter, having lost her husband and sons. But she brought a convert daughter-in-law to Bethlehem to become the great-great-grandmother of King David, whose royal line brings our Messiah. Our Savior came from a convert’s family!

Modern Shepherds: Although most of the six million inhabitants of this little land of Israel do not even know anything about Him, I am grateful that I do. Some of my neighbors are shepherds, possibly descendants of ancient shepherds. My family and I have shared their happiness when their babies were born—as naturally as the baby lambs are born. We have mourned with them as their children die.

The Story of Jamil: One of those children was my little Arab friend Jamil, with blonde hair and big brown eyes. For years this silent child, dwarfed and barrel-chested by illness, would stand by me every week as I told and read the story of Jesus' birth to tourists sitting with me on the hillsides with sheep and shepherds. Jamil even managed to smile a time or two. He did not understand the words, he could not hear nor could he speak, but he soaked in the spirit and love of our simple songs and unspoken love. Week after week, month after month, year after year, he came running out of his mother's tent to be with us.

One day there was no Jamil—and his mother would not come out of the tent. His cousin from a nearby tent explained, "Jamil died." The next few weeks were not the same, although other children came to watch and listen to us. Life eventually seemed to return to normal, but his mother never seemed to lose the grief of Jamil's death. Months later she finally asked me, "Picture . . . Jamil?" I realized she missed him so. It took several months to locate someone who had taken a picture of Jamil. We had it enlarged and framed. Then one of our tourist guests, a modern Ruth, presented the photo to the shepherd mother.

Our Arab driver explained to the shepherdess that Ruth had also lost her son just months before. Ruth offered the framed photo that contained an inscription, a promise that Jamil is waiting for his mother and that they will be reunited. Our shepherdess, typically showing no emotion, took the picture. Then as the two women sank to the base of an olive tree, both softly wept. The shepherd mother slowly rocked back and forth, holding Jamil close to her. This

began the end of her grief; I sensed that she believed the promise that was made.

We made the promise because we know that another child from Bethlehem made it possible for families to be reunited. We shared the thought that in the meantime, departed ones are still near at hand. For more than twenty years, tourists and I have shared feelings and sung songs to these humble shepherds—songs that angels announced two thousand years ago. We cannot sing, "Far, far away on Judea's plains." The words come out as, "Near, near at hand on Judea's hills, shepherds of old heard the joyous trills!"

Today's shepherds may not yet understand our words, but one day they will; they will understand the gift of the One born in a manger.

Jesus' youth was spent in Nazareth, an obscure town in the region of Galilee.

"Nazareth, a city in Galilee, sacred to Christians as the home of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. According to the new Testament, Jesus' birth was announced to Mary in Nazareth. Jesus was brought up in the town, and although he did almost all his preaching outside of Nazareth, he was known in his lifetime as "Jesus of Nazareth." Early Christians were contemptuously called "Nazarenes" by their enemies, and the Hebrew and Arabic terms for Christian are derived from the town's name." ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

Another section of the book, **ISRAEL REVEALED**, gives added insights to Jesus' life in Nazareth.

NAZARETH

Childhood Home of Jesus: Well off the traditional crossroad is Nazareth. Today it is a busy city of Arabs and Jews. Its Arab population makes it one of the largest Arab cities in Israel. About twelve hundred feet above sea level and halfway between the Mediterranean and the waters of Galilee, this obscure town became the childhood home of Jesus. Jesus' upbringing surely included learning the tasks and crafts of his environment.

"Is not this the carpenter's son?"
([Matthew 13:55](#))

Although western language Bibles refer to Mary's husband, Joseph, as a carpenter, the Greek Bible calls him a craftsman. The industry of Nazareth was, and still is, the regional rock quarry.

Rock of Salvation: That profession surely could have included the trade of working in stone. Interestingly, Jehovah, later known as Jesus, is called the "Rock of Salvation."

"The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence." ([2 Samuel 22:3](#))

Although it is popular to consider Jesus as a carpenter, He also studied the Law of Moses. In fact, He was considered a rabbi, one schooled in the law. At twelve years of age He was in the temple—with the lawyers—answering and asking questions. Was this an apprentice craftsman or an apprentice lawyer becoming a "son of the law" (*Bar Mitzvah* in Aramaic)? Nowadays, someone schooled in the law is called a lawyer. Jesus was the lawgiver, our advocate with the Father.

"For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us." ([Isaiah 33:22](#))

Bar Mitzvah: When a Jewish lad turns twelve years of age, he has the opportunity to study a section of the Law and the Prophets, a section he will recite at his Bar Mitzvah. Jews regularly read the Law and the Prophets publicly three times a week (Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturday-Sabbaths). All congregations read the same section on each of those days. Therefore, the boy must choose which day he will read—and then be trained in that particular section throughout his twelfth year. A lawyer (rabbi) has been sufficiently trained to read the appropriate sections at any given time. Jesus apparently had that training.

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read."
([Luke 4:16](#))

Messianic Prophecy: His reading fulfilled a definite messianic prophecy, and Jesus concluded by testifying that He was the realization of Isaiah's prediction.

"And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,
To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.”
(Luke 4:17-21)

The congregation apparently heard the words but became enraged that he would point himself out as the “Anointed One” (*Messiah* in Hebrew). To them, that kind of blasphemy warranted death.

“And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.”
(Luke 4:28-29)

MOUNT OF PRECIPITATION

Close to forty different churches mark traditional sites of Jesus’ youth. However, the only scripturally supported site is an old Nazareth quarry.

A Place for Stoning: This is probably the place where angered Nazarenes would have stoned Jesus for blasphemy. This is known today as the Mount of Jumping or the Mount of Precipitation. Rabbinic interpretations of the ancient Jewish law of stoning indicate that it was required that the victim be thrown over a cliff (the execution). The accuser was responsible to make sure the criminal was dead. If not, the accuser had to take the first stone and crush the victim’s heart. The accuser always had to cast the first stone and then all others threw stones to cover the body (the burial). Jesus was brought to the edge of the hill, “But he passing

through the midst of them went his way.”
(Luke 4:30)

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An added thought about Jesus’ youth includes his experience at the Temple. It is suggested that Jesus was there at the age of twelve to become a “Son of the Law.” That expression in Aramaic is “Bar Mitzvah,” which usually happens at the end of the twelfth year, usually at his thirteenth birthday. In some Jewish circles, a boy may become a Bar Mitzvah one year earlier if he has no father. Jesus had no earthly father. Gently, He reminded His parents,

“And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?” **(Luke 2:49)**