

JANUARY 7-13, 2019

# Matthew 1; Luke 1

“Be It unto Me according to Thy Word”

---

**Summary:** *Christ is born of Mary—She conceives by the power of the Holy Ghost Our Lord is named Jesus.*

*Gabriel promises Zacharias that Elisabeth will bear a son, whom they will name John—He also tells Mary that she will be the mother of the Son of God—Mary visits Elisabeth and utters a psalm of praise—John the Baptist is born—Zacharias prophesies of John’s mission.*

---

**Supplemental  
Jewish and  
Holy Land  
Insights**

Zacharias, a worthy priest in the temple, his wife Elisabeth, and John the Baptist initially lived in a city of “Judah.” Being priests, they likely lived in a town that was disciplined by priestly rules of cleanliness.

**Levitical Cities**

“ . . . there were 48 Levitical cities which were traditionally set apart, usually four from every tribe, for the exclusive residence of the Levites. Included in these were the six cities of refuge.” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#)) Cities of refuge are like Temple cities.

“And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: . . . Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how

the Lord had showed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John. . . . And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marveled all.”

**(Luke 1:39-63)**

Ein Kerem in the fertile watershed hills just outside Jerusalem is the traditional birthplace of John. However, another small Arab town named Yatta, just outside the hills of Hebron may be a more likely location for their residence. It is farther from Jerusalem and seems a more likely place to hide than Ein Kerem. As mentioned in a previous Old Testament lesson supplement, that town’s name, Yatta, may be a derivation of the word Judah. It also has an archaeological ruin of an ancient “Levite” synagogue. It is tempting to give archaeology, plus a written account of “City of Juda,” a little more credence than just tradition. With a linguistic twist we could say that John came from Utah! Utah means “tops

of the mountains” and Judah is in the tops of the mountains of Israel. John from Judah preceded the era of the Savior’s first coming. Prophets from Utah are preceding the era of the Savior’s second coming.

### **The Forerunner**

John knew who he was and surely knew who the Savior was. Like all prophets, he bore witness of the Lord and desired to bring people to Him.

“Why did John send two of his disciples to Jesus to ask if he were the promised Messiah? (Matt. 11:2-6; Luke 7:19-23) Any inference that the Baptist was uncertain or doubtful in his own mind, as to the identity and mission of the Master, is totally unwarranted. In reality, the imprisoned Elias and forerunner of our Lord was using this means to persuade his disciples to forsake him and follow Jesus.” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Vol.1, p.251*)

“There is not a prophet who has borne greater or more important testimony of Jesus than that which fell from John's lips. (Luke 7:28) Joseph Smith gave three reasons why John was considered one of the greatest prophets. First, he was entrusted with a divine mission of preparing the way before the face of the Lord. Whoever had such a trust committed to him before or since? No man. Secondly, he was entrusted with the important mission, and it was required at his hands, to baptize the Son of Man. Whoever had the honor of doing that? Whoever had so great a privilege and glory? Whoever led the Son of God into the waters of baptism, and had the

privilege of beholding the Holy Ghost descend in the form of a dove, or rather in the sign of the dove, in witness of that administration? Thirdly, John, at that time was the only legal administrator in the affairs of the kingdom there was then on earth. And holding the keys of power, the Jews had to obey his instructions or be damned, by their own law; and Christ himself fulfilled all righteousness in becoming obedient to the law which he had given to Moses on the mount, and thereby magnified it and made it honorable, instead of destroying it. The son of Zacharias wrested the keys, the kingdom, the power, the glory from the Jews, by the holy anointing and decree of heaven, and these three reasons constitute him the greatest prophet born of woman. (Teachings, pp. 275-276.)” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Vol.1, p.262 - p.263*)

### **Repent, Return, the Same Word**

In this lesson, the word “turn” is emphasized (Luke 1:16-17). In Hebrew the word “turn” is the same word as repent, hence “men turn to God” and sometimes the term is used that “God repents.” Actually, it is His turning to man as man turns to Him, giving a great symbolism to “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers.”

### **Wise Men or Magi**

Middle Eastern Christians have a tradition of three wise men or Magi that come from the East bearing gifts for a newborn King. Even scriptures tell us of Herod the Great receiving those visitors, seeking the child “*King of The Jews.*” Conniving Herod told them to let him

know when they found him, so he could reverence the “*child-to-be-king.*” When they did not return, Herod ordered all the children killed in the Bethlehem who were two-years old and under, **(Matthew 2:1-16).**

Somehow, many nativity sets show the wise men at the birth even though the scriptures indicate a time frame of about two years later. Likewise, countless nativity scenes depict the wise men as two light-skinned, and one dark-skinned person. Throughout the world, these scenes have a pleasant symbolism, dark skinned and light skinned – worshipping the Messiah of all mankind. “Matthew’s account of ‘wise men from the east’ coming to Jerusalem and Bethlehem in search of the Christ Child is sometimes recited as a visit of three Magi. Actually, there is no historical basis for the prevailing legend that they were from the apostate Persian cult or that they were three in number. It is much more probable that they were devout men who knew of our Lord’s coming advent, including the promise that a new star would arise, and that they came as prophets of any age would have done to worship their King. It is clear, that they were in tune with the Lord and were receiving revelation from him, for they were ‘warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod.’ **(Matt. 2:12.)**” **(Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, p.462)**

There are three Book of Mormon prophets in this particular time frame who prophesied the Lord’s imminent coming. These three also seemed to “*disappear,*” or, “*were not heard*

*of again,*” an Alma, Samuel the Lamanite, and a Nephi. Alma and Nephi had light skin and Samuel the Lamanite, likely, a darker skin. **(Alma 45:18, Helaman 16:7-8, 3 Nephi 1:3, 3 Nephi 2:9)**

“Our Lord’s birth into mortality was accompanied by the appearance of a new star in the heavens. One of Samuel the Lamanite’s Messianic prophecies foretold this heavenly sign **(Helaman 14:5)**, and the Nephites knew of the promised birth because they saw the new star that arose according to Samuel’s word. **(3 Ne. 1:21.)**” **(Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, p.765)**

There’s a “Made-in-Bethlehem” nativity scene in my home, with wise men, yet, I’ve placed them a distance off!

### **Scriptural Comparisons**

Virgin Shall Conceive

**Matthew 1:18-25 . . . . . Isaiah 7:14, 2 Nephi 17:4**

Ordinances

**Luke 1:5-25 . . . . . Ezekiel 11:20**

Holy Ghost

**Luke 1:28-35 . . . . . Alma 7:7-12**