

*The Gospel According to*

SAINT MATTHEW

SAINT MARK

SAINT LUKE

SAINT JOHN

|                         |                         |  |                         |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|--|-------------------------|
| <p>NOTHING RECORDED</p> | <p>NOTHING RECORDED</p> | <p>CHAPTER 2, VERSES 8-20</p> <p><b>2:8</b> - And there were in the same country<sup>1</sup> shepherds<sup>2</sup> abiding<sup>3</sup> in the field, keeping watch<sup>4</sup> over their flock<sup>5</sup> by night<sup>6</sup>.</p> <p><b>2:9</b> - And, lo, the angel of the Lord<sup>7</sup> came upon them, and the glory<sup>8</sup> of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid<sup>9</sup>.</p> <p><b>2:10</b> - And the angel said unto them, Fear not<sup>10</sup>: for, behold, I bring you good tidings<sup>11</sup> of great joy, which shall be to all people<sup>12</sup>.</p> <p><b>2:11</b> - For unto you is born this day in the city of David<sup>13</sup> a Saviour<sup>14</sup>, which is Christ<sup>15</sup> the Lord.</p> <p><b>2:12</b> - And this shall be a sign<sup>16</sup> unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes<sup>17</sup>, lying in a manger<sup>18</sup>.</p> <p><b>2:13</b> - And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host<sup>19</sup> praising God, and saying,</p> <p><b>2:14</b> - Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men<sup>20</sup>.</p> <p><b>2:15</b> - And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go<sup>21</sup> even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.</p> <p><b>2:16</b> - And they came with haste, and found<sup>22</sup> Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.</p> <p><b>2:17</b> - And when they had seen it, they made known abroad<sup>23</sup> the saying which was told them concerning this child.</p> <p><b>2:18</b> - And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.</p> <p><b>2:19</b> - But Mary kept all these things<sup>24</sup>, and pondered them in her heart.</p> <p><b>2:20</b> - And the shepherds returned<sup>25</sup>, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.</p> | <p>NOTHING RECORDED</p> |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|--|-------------------------|

**CHRONOLOGY:** April 6, 4BCE\*

\* The established year for this chapter is based on the year of Jesus' birth, which is highly debated. Below is a list of possible years for Jesus' birth. The chronology of Jesus' life in this book is based on the author's belief that Jesus was born in 4BCE. The most likely years for Jesus' birth are 1BCE, 4BCE and 5BCE. The other years are problematic.

- Year theories: 1 BCE - Supported by the Apostle James E. Talmage & Secular Biblical Scholars Pearson and Hug & the creator of Gregorian Calendar: Dionysius Exiguus.
- 2 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholar Scalinger.
- 2/3 BCE - Supported by early Christian writers and historians Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Africanus, Hippolytus of Rome, Hippolytus of Thebes, Origen, Eusebius and Epiphanius.
- 3 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Baronius and Paulus.
- 4 BCE** - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Bengel, Wieseler & Greswell. **Supported by this Author.**
- 5 BCE - Supported by the Apostle Bruce R. McConkie, the Apostle J. Rueben Clark, and Secular Biblical Scholars Usher and Petavius.
- 6 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Strong, Luvin and Clark.
- 7 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Ideler and Sanclemente.

**LOCATION:** Bethlehem

**COMMENTARY:** The story of the Savior's birth would not be complete without the visitation of the shepherds. What most people do not know is that Levitical Temple Shepherd tended to the sacrificial lambs just outside of Bethlehem in a place called Migdal Eder. These special shepherds were trained to inspect the sacrifices to assure that they were without blemish and qualified to be offered as a redemption from sin. They tended to the births of firstborn lambs, and wrapped them in swaddling clothes to assure that they wouldn't break a bone and be disqualified by blemish. The God of Heaven sent these witnesses to see the Lamb of God, and witness that He was the promised final sacrifice.

## FOOTNOTES:

- 1- county - The term "country" is translated from the Greek word "χώρα" or "chōra". The Greek word can be used for the space lying between two places or limits. It can also be used for the area surrounding a larger city. It might include smaller towns and villages. It is also used to depict farm land. See also the commentary in Chapter 5, footnote #3 and Chapter 7, footnote #31. In reference to this footnote, it is the unpopulated land outside of Bethlehem. Below is a picture of modern day Bethlehem and its rolling hills.



The Biblical scholar, Edersheim wrote, "We know that, on the night in which our Saviour was born, the angels' message came to those who were probably alone in or near Bethlehem. On the road to Jerusalem, was a tower, known as Migdal Eder, the 'watch-tower of the flock'. For here was the station where shepherds watched their flocks destined for sacrifices in the Temple. So well known was this, that if animals were found as far from Jerusalem as Migdal Eder, and within that circuit on every side, the males were offered as burnt-offerings, the females as peace-offerings. R. Jehudah adds: 'If suited for Paschal sacrifices, then they are Paschal sacrifices, provided it be not more than thirty days before the feast'. It seems of deepest significance, almost like the fulfillment of type, that those shepherds who first heard tidings of the Savior's birth, who first listened to angel's praises, were watching flocks destined to be offered as sacrifices in the temple...It is when we remember, that presently these shepherds would be in the Temple, and meet those who came thither to worship and to sacrifice, that we perceive the full significance of what otherwise would have seemed scarcely worthwhile noticing in connection with humble shepherds." (Sketches of Jewish Social Life, Alfred Edersheim, pages 76-77).

Most people have never heard of "Migdal Eder". The word "Migdal Eder" is a Hebrew name. "Migdal" or "מגדל" means a tower, castle or raised bed. "Eder" or "צדר" which means a flock or a fold. Hence, Migdal Eder is the "tower of the flock". Some translate it into the "watch-tower of the flock". Archeologists have identified a site just north of Bethlehem as Migdal Eder. It is located about 1000 paces (a mile) from Bethlehem. The Migdal Eder is mentioned in Jewish oral law "Of the herds, in the space between Jerusalem and 'the tower of the flock' and on both sides, the males are for burnt-offerings, the female for peace-offerings. R. Jehuda says, whatever male animals are found (there) thirty days before the passover fit for it, are to be used thereto." (Mass. Shekalim c. 7. 4).

The shepherds at Migdal Eder were trained to raise sacrificial lambs for the Temple Festivals. They were educated in what was required so as not to hurt or damage a lamb when it was born and to wrap it in "swaddling clothes" immediately after its birth. They maintained a ceremonially clean stable for a birthing place for their ewes and the surrounding fields were those of the shepherds who grazed their flocks for the Temple sacrifices. These flocks had to be grazed outdoors 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and had to be in the field 30 days before being offered for sacrifice, but were brought into 'Migdal Eder' to birth their lambs where they could be carefully cared for by the shepherds. These were not normal ewes, but specially selected ewes. They were the first born. According to Edersheim in "The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah", in Book 2, Chapter 6, "This Migdal Eder was not the watchtower for the ordinary flocks that pastured on the barren sheep ground beyond Bethlehem, but it lay close to the town, on the road to Jerusalem. A passage from the Mishnah (Shekelim 7:4) 3 leads to the conclusion that the flocks which pastured there were destined for Temple sacrifices." The correlation to the story of the Savior's birth is striking. The Savior was THE sacrificial lamb. He was destined to be the ultimate sacrifice. He was brought to Migdal Eder for his birth, just like the ewes that were designated to be sacrificed at the Altar of the temple. Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes like all the other sacrificial ewes, and the Shepherds were dispatched to inspect Jesus or rather bear testimony of who He was.

One might wonder why the location associated with lambs and shepherds was equipped with a tower. In ancient times, a military tower was erected on the



edge of Bethlehem to view into the valley and protect the city. This was actually a common practice, and "watch-towers" can be found throughout Israel. Several of these military towers are recorded in the Old Testament (See Judges 8:71, 9:46, 9:51; 2 Kings 9:17, 18:8; Nehemiah 3:1). Such towers symbolize protection and safety. The Book of Proverbs records, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." (Proverbs 18:10). The tower at Bethlehem is first mentioned in Genesis 35:21, "And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar". After Jacob left Bethel, he came to Edar (the tower) and there Rachel began hard labor and as she delivered Benjamin she died and was buried there in Ephrathah which is Bethlehem. After burying Rachel, Jacob moved his flocks beyond the tower of Edar. This would pinpoint the location as being near to what is present day Bethlehem. Clearly, this establishes that Migdal Eder, "the tower of the flock" was in Bethlehem in Bible times. So back to the original question. The watch tower at Migdal Eder would have been used by the shepherds for protection from their enemies and wild beasts. It was also the place ewes were safely brought to give birth to the lambs. In this sheltered building or the nearby caves, the priests would bring in the ewes which were about to lamb for protection. These special lambs came from a unique flock that was designated for sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem. The Savior would have been born in one of the nearby caves used for stabling these special sheep for birthing.



Example Ruins of an Ancient Israelite Watch-Tower



2- **shepherds** - The word "shepherds" is derived from the Greek word "ποιμήν" or "poimēn". It means herdsman; especially that of a shepherd. The shepherd is the first profession mentioned in the Bible. The Book of Genesis records, **"And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground."** (Genesis 4:2). Ancient shepherds were more than just men in the business of raising and selling sheep. Sheep were utterly dependent upon their shepherd to lead them to pastures (they eat grasses), provide them with water, and protect them from danger. Ancient shepherds lived with their sheep. The sheep became so familiar with their shepherd that they actually became acquainted with their shepherd's voice. He could call them and they would come. The sheep were usually counted each evening as they enter the fold, but sometimes the shepherd dispenses with the counting, for he was able to feel the absence of any one of his sheep. With one sheep gone, something is felt to be missing from the appearance of the entire flock. There was an interesting sense of family.

The shepherd was always on the lookout for sheep in his flock that needed personal attention. He was their veterinarian as well. Lambs often suffered sunburns, or injury from the rugged terrain. Sheep often became badly scratched by thorn bushes that covered the land. The good shepherd always came to the rescue. A Shepherd's most common remedy for his sheep was olive oil, a supply of which he carried in a ram's horn. Rubbing olive oil on an injury helped coagulate the wound and mend the injury. It should be noted that there is direct symbolism relating to modern anointing oil carried by priesthood holders and used to administer priesthood blessings.

It was very important that sheep should not be allowed to stray away from the flock. Sheep are very venerable and lack a significant defensive ability. Each fold also contained sheep that needed special care. There were typically baby lambs, and sheep with young ones. When lambing time comes, the shepherd must take great care of his flock as the number of sheep that needed his special care increased. The task is made more difficult because it so often becomes necessary to move to a new location to find pasturage. The sheep that are soon to become mothers, as well as those with their young ones, must be kept close to the shepherd while in transit. Little helpless lambs that cannot keep up with the rest of the flock, are carried in the bosom of his undergarment, the girdle turning it into a pocket. If these become lost they are utterly helpless. In such a condition, they become bewildered, for they have no sense at all of locality. And if they do stray away, they must be brought back.



There is evidence that the hierarchy of Judaea view the occupation of shepherd as an inferior trade. It is believed that they disliked the nomadic nature of their trade, and the fact that they often grazed their flocks on land that belonged to other people. Sanders writes, **"One of the despised trades was being a herdsman. Those who herded 'small cattle' (sheep and goats) transgressed the rabbinic rule that allowed sheep and goats to be pastured only 'on the steepes' (Billerbeck's translation of 'deserts': Bava Qamma 7-7)."** (Judaism: Practice & Belief 63BCE - 66CE, E.P. Sanders, page 461). Even so, that was not necessarily the views of all Judaea. **"It would be much more reasonable to think that Palestine's graziers were respected..."** (Judaism: Practice & Belief 63BCE - 66CE, E.P. Sanders, page 464), especially since they represented the biggest industry in Judaea.

For centuries sheep have been an important part of life in Israel, providing local inhabitants with wool, milk, and meat. **"The temple and the festivals, particularly Passover, required tens of thousands of sacrificial animals, especially sheep; sheep and goats also accounted for a high percentage of the gross national product (wool, hides, meat, butter, and cheese)."** (Judaism: Practice & Belief 63BCE - 66CE, E.P. Sanders, page 463). The Bible frequently compares sheep to men, illustrating their dependency and helplessness.



Just south of Jerusalem, and nearly connected to the northern fringe Bethlehem, was an area called Migdal Eder. Migdal Eder is discussed in more detail in footnote #1 of this Chapter. Suffice it to say that the shepherds of Migdal Eder were very special shepherds. They were shepherds of the sheep destined for the Temple. They inspected and maintained that the sheep were qualified to be a proper sacrifice. These sheep were considered to be perfect sacrifices. They were without blemish, and were symbols of the Savior. It is theorized that the shepherds who received the annunciation were indeed the Temple Shepherds of Migdal Eder. Though there is compelling arguments that favor this theory, there is no scripture confirmation. We do know that **"These particular shepherds were righteous and men who by lives of holiness and purity had prepared themselves to behold the angelic presence and hear the heavenly choirs."** (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Bruce R. McConkie, page 97). It is highly probable that these were Jesus' shepherds.

3- **abiding in the field** - The Codex Sinaiticus replaced the word "abiding" with the word "living". This phrase is translated from a single Greek word. The Greek word "ἀγραυλέω" or "agrauleō" means to live in the fields, under the open sky, even at night. It is literally a contraction of the word field and house. **"...agraulountes means that the shepherds made the open fields (agroï) their house (aule, see Luke 11:21). Attempts to date the birth of Jesus by this detail to certain months of the year have been legion, but they are more speculative than convincing."** (The Gospel According to Luke: I-IX, The Anchor-Yale Bible Commentary, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 409). The theory is that the sheep would only be grazing in the fields during the spring and summer months; however, we know that the Temple sheep free grazed 365 days a year.



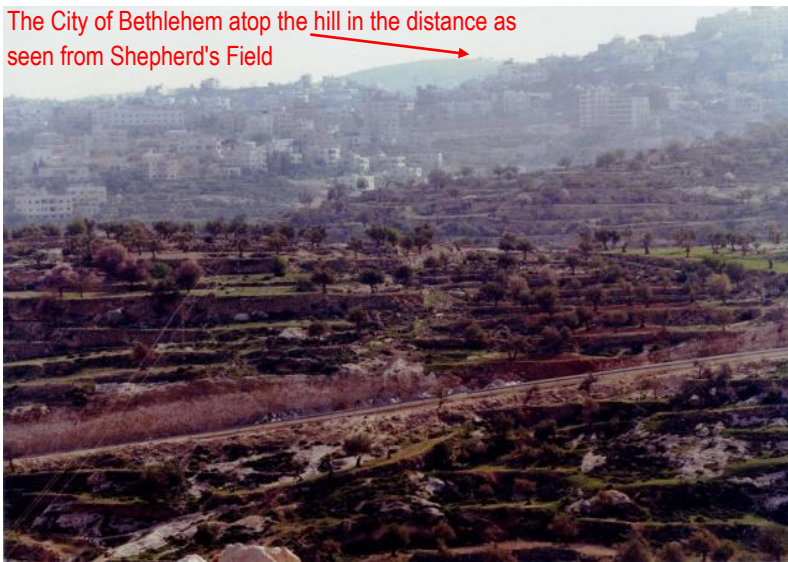
There is a place, outside of Bethlehem, called shepherd's field. Many speculate that shepherd's field was the place that the shepherds received the annunciation of the Savior. Years ago, I visited the site. Our company first visited the church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. It was our first stop in a series of sacred sites. As one might expect, my hopes were high. When I entered the Church of the Nativity, I saw the chapel covered with soot from years of burning incense. I saw Catholic priests chanting Latin and swinging censors of incense. The Church was ancient, and interesting, but void of spirit. However, I had not been to the actual sacred site yet. The church was built over a cave believed to be the birth place of Jesus. We walked down a series of stairs, and entered the cave. The cave had been reinforced with iron bands, and it was packed with tourist. As we mottled our way through, we came to a silver star embossed into the floor with a cavity of water in the center. It was believed to be the actual spot of Jesus' birth. People were kneeling down, dipping their hand in the water, and making the Catholic sign of the cross. Then they kissed the star. Next to the star was an altar that represented the location of the manger. The entire cave was void of the spirit. In fact, it felt cold and empty despite the fact that it was full of people. I was very disappointed. I thought to myself, I have come half way across the world to strengthen my testimony and I have found relics without spirit.



We traveled a short distance to shepherd's field. Thereafter, we hiked up a short hill of rock laden terrain where we sat and read Luke Chapter 2. As we read about the Shepherds, something miraculous happened. It was not choreographed, but it felt like it. A young Bedouin shepherd led his sheep through our company. The Bedouin of today haven't changed much in two thousand years. He was dressed as though he came through a time machine. As we watched, our eyes were opened. We could see Bethlehem on a hill in the distance. Suddenly, I was looking through the eyes of the shepherd. I could almost see where the angel might have stood. It was then that the spirit of the Lord filled that hill. A spirit that testified that the Savior had been born in Bethlehem so long ago. My heart was full, and my testimony strengthen, but I was puzzled. Why had the spirit withdrew in Bethlehem, but was so full on that empty hill. Below is a picture I took that day, one can even see the ruins of a watch-tower in the background.



The City of Bethlehem atop the hill in the distance as seen from Shepherd's Field



Professor Sheldon Dahl, a BYU professor, who was leading our tour asked if we noticed the difference in spirit between the two locations. We all felt what I had, though until that point I had no idea what everyone else was experiencing. Professor Dahl explained that the Prophet Spencer W. Kimball had visited the Church of the Nativity. In prophetic fashion, he proclaimed that the cave under the Church of the Nativity was indeed the birth place of Jesus. He also said that the site was devoid of spirit because man has desecrated the holy site.

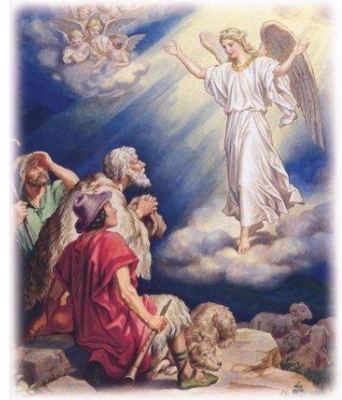
It is no wonder that the Angel of the Lord appeared to these men, abiding or living in the field. They were free from worldly distractions, and things that would offend the spirit. They were tending to the Temple sheep. They were righteous men. They were humble and obedient. One can almost see the angel pointing to Bethlehem in the distance. The star that symbolizes his birth would have shined in the dark of the night sky.



4- watch - The term "watch" comes from the Greek word "φυλακή" or "phylakē". It means to guard, to keep watch, or to stand as sentinel. The term is also used to depict a three hour block of time during the night in which guards were posted, i.e. the first watch. The Codex Sinaiticus actually uses the word "guard" in the place of the word "watch". Another Biblical scholar records, "Literally 'watching watches of the night'. The cognate acc. suggests a distributive nuance: the shepherds guarded the flock in shifts. Cf. Numbers 3:7,8,28; 8:26 for similar expressions. The nocturnal watch of the shepherds is singled out in preparation for the shining glory." (The Gospel According to Luke: I-IX, The Anchor-Yale Bible Commentary, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 409).



"The watches of the night" or the night-time are set periods of time which guards were assigned to stand guard. A watch was originally one of the three or four periods of time, during which a watch or guard was kept, into which the night was divided by the Jews and Romans ("watches" A Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, ed Elizabeth Knowles, Oxford University Press, 2006. Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press. University of Hull. 19 September 2008). The first watch was from 6:00PM to 9:00PM, and didn't typically have a guard assigned. The second watch was from 9:00PM to 12:00 Midnight. The third watch was from 12:00AM to 3:00AM, with the final watch from 3:00AM to 6:00AM.



| Watches of the Night | Time Period        |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| First Watch:         | 06:00PM to 09:00PM |
| Second Watch:        | 09:00PM to 12:00PM |
| Third Watch:         | 12:00AM to 03:00AM |
| Forth Watch:         | 03:00AM to 06:00AM |

We do not know how many shepherds were there that night. Neither do we know how many were standing watch. We do know that watches were generally done from a tower. The Old Testament is full of references to watches from towers. Habakkuk says, **"I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved."** (Habakkuk 2:1).

Many believe that the Shepherd's of the Annunciation, standing watch in the field, were a fulfillment of this Old Testament Prophecy:

**"And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem."** (Micah 4:8)

The term "tower of the flock" in Micah's prophecy is translated from the Hebrew word, "Migdal Eder". The daughter of Jerusalem is believed to be reference to Mary the mother of Jesus. **Herein is the prophecy fulfilled.**

The History of Migdal Eder is long. It is first mentioned in the Old Testament, way back in the Book of Genesis. Jacob, who was renamed Israel, visited there with his flock. **"And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar."** (Genesis 35:21) Based on other references to his location, it is believed that this is the Migdal Eder of Bethlehem. Unfortunately, the word Migdal Eder is not just the name of the location outside of Bethlehem, but it is used for many guard towers in Israel. Watching for enemies and danger was the key to safety. So, they were plentiful. They were erected where ever there was a city or inhabitants. Often cities had many.

Spiritually, we have watchman and towers. The Prophet and the Church serve as a watchman on a tower. Often you and I are called to be watchman. We watch over those that we have been called to serve. This might be our children, our brother and sisters, or other groups of Father's children. Ultimately, the Lord is our greatest watchman, with the heavens as his tower. Jeremiah wrote, **"And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the Lord."** (Jeremiah 31:28). The cities equipped with watch towers needed to listen and look for the warnings of the watchmen. What good was a tower, to which no one looked towards. Speaking of the last days, modern revelation records, **"And then they shall look for me, and, behold, I will come; and they shall see me in the clouds of heaven, clothed with power and great glory; with all the holy angels; and he that watches not for me shall be cut off."** (Doctrine & Covenants 45:44). We MUST watch. The shepherd's were a great example. They watched and consequently they beheld.

- 5 - **flock** - The term "flock" is translated from the Greek word "τροίμνη" or "poimnē". It means a flock, especially in relation to sheep. The phrase "over the flock by night" is translated in the Codex Sinaiticus as "during the watches of the night". During lambing season the flocks were brought to the tower from the fields. Below the watch tower, in the lower levels of the field, shepherds established a birthing room for sacrificial lambs. Being themselves under special rabbinical care, these priestly shepherds, many argue that they were actual priests, would strictly maintain a ceremonially clean birthing place. Once birthed, the priestly shepherds would routinely place the lambs in the hewn depression of a limestone rock known as "the manger" and "wrap the newborn lambs in swaddling clothes," preventing them from thrashing about and harming themselves "until they had calmed down" so they could be inspected for the quality of being "without spot or blemish" (the Jewish oral tradition & Alfred Edersheim, "the Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah").



We have no references to tell us how big the flock was at Migdal Eder. Flocks were generally small. Shepherds could only manage so many sheep; however, this was no ordinary flock. These were Temple sheep and a times numbered in the thousands. We can safely say that there were a significant number for sheep. This would also be supported by the fact that there were multiple shepherds. The Apostle Bruce R. McConkie wrote, **"In the fields of Bethlehem, not far from Jerusalem and the temple of Jehovah, there were shepherds watching their flocks by night. These were not ordinary shepherds nor ordinary flocks. The sheep there be herded - nay, not herded, but watched over, cared for with love and devotion - were destined for sacrifice on the great altar of the Lord's House, in similitude of the eternal sacrifice of Him who that wondrous night lay in a stable, perhaps among sheep of a lesser destiny."** (The Mortal Messiah, Volume 1, Bruce R. McConkie, page 225).

- 6 - **night** - The term "night" comes from the Greek word "νύξ" or "nyk". It means simply night. What is more interesting is the way the word is used metaphorically. It can be used in reference to the time of death. It can be used to refer to a time of sin and shame. It can be used for a time of moral stupidity and spiritual void. This is quite interesting since the shepherds (figuratively God's leaders) were watching the sheep (figuratively followers of Christ) at night (During a time of wickedness and sin). The symbolism is striking. In a world full of sin and darkness, we must look to the shepherd for safety.

We know that the angel appeared to the shepherds during the night; however, we do not know what time of night it occurred. Neither do we know which watch it occurred during.

- 7 - **Angel of the Lord** - The angel does not introduce himself, at least not in the Lucan narrative. Since Gabriel has been the angel preparing the way, we might assume that it is Gabriel appearing to the Shepherds. Gabriel appeared to Zacharias, Mary and Joseph. Though this might make sense, it is at best speculation.

The word "Angel" comes from the Greek word "ἄγγελος" or "aggelos"; which means messenger, envoy, one who is sent, or an angel. It is also used for any messenger from God. The word "Lord" is translated from the Greek word "κύριος" or "kyrios". It is used as a title for someone that has ownership or the power to decide. It can be a title of respect given by servants to a master. It is a generic title sometimes used for deity. It is also a title given to the Messiah.

See also the commentary for the word "Angel" in Chapter 3, footnote #3, and Chapter 4, footnote #22.

See also the commentary for the word "Lord" in Chapter 2, footnote # 21 & # 28, Chapter 5, footnote #23, and Chapter 8, footnote #38.

8 - **glory of the Lord shone round about** - "In the Septuigent 'doxa' translates Hebrew kaabod, the 'splendor, brilliance' associated with Yahweh's perceptible presence to his people." (The Gospel According to Luke: I-IX, The Anchor-Yale Bible Commentary, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 409). Strong's concordance of the Bible gives several translations for the Greek word "doxa". See also the commentary on the word "light" in Chapter 8, footnote #44.

1. It can be used to mean an opinion, judgment or view.
2. Splendor, brightness, majesty, exterior light
3. An exalted state, a most glorious condition

| English           | Greek                       | Proper Translation     |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Glory             | "δόξα" or "doxa"            | Brilliance or Splendor |
| Lord              | "κύριος" or "kyrios"        | The Lord               |
| shone round about | "περιλάμπω" or "perilampoo" | To shine around        |

Glory seems to be a characteristic of God, and heavenly beings. Celestial glory also seems to be accompanied by brilliant light. Speaking of this glorious light, Bruce R. McConkie wrote, "The glory of the Lord" - a part of that ancient glory, the Shekinah, which had of old rested in the Holy of Holies and which soon would shine forth on the Holy Mount where Peter, James, and John and Jesus would be the only mortals present." (The Mortal Messiah, Volume 1, Bruce R. McConkie, page 226).

Moses experiences this glory as he spoke with God through the burning bush. The scriptures all full of examples of visitations from on high and glorious light. Here are a few;

Angels at Jesus' Tomb

"And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulcher, and two angels standing by it in **shining garments**." (Joseph Smith Translation of Luke 24:2)

The First Vision

"I saw a **pillar of light** exactly over my head, above the **brightness of the sun**, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When **the light rested upon me** I saw two Personages, **whose brightness and glory defy all description**, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Joseph Smith History, 1:16-17)

Visitation of the Angel Moroni to Joseph Smith

"While I was thus in the act of calling upon God, I discovered a **light appearing** in my room, which continued to increase until **the room was lighter than at noonday**, when immediately a personage appeared at my bedside, standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor." (Joseph Smith History, 1:30)

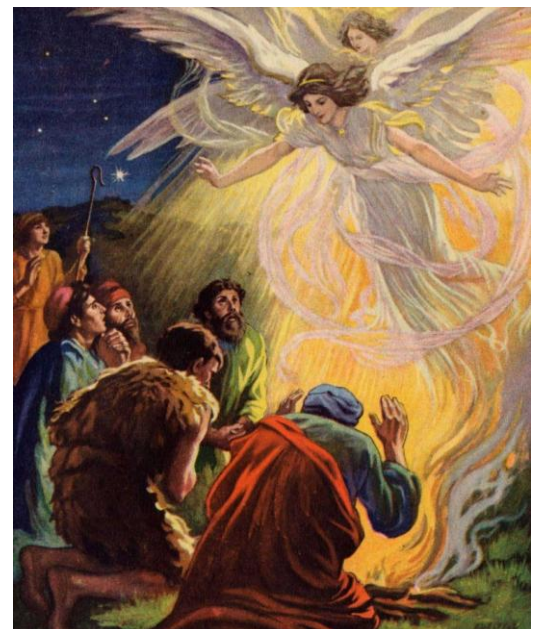
"Not only was his robe exceedingly white, but his whole person was **glorious beyond description**, and his countenance **truly like lightning**. The room was **exceedingly light**, but not so very bright as immediately around his person. When I first looked upon him, I was afraid; but the fear soon left me." (Joseph Smith History, 1:32)

Jesus appears in the Kirtland Temple

"His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; **his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun**; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah..." (Doctrine & Covenants 110:3)

Other events that resulted in light, or glory

- "The skin of his face shone while he talked with God" (Exodus 34:29)
- "Jesus' face did shine..." (Matthew 17:2, Mark 9:2-3)
- "Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory..." (2 Corinthians 3:7)
- "Abinadi's face shown with exceeding luster" (Mosiah 13:5-9)
- "They were encircled about as if by fire" (Helaman 5:23, 36, 43-45)
- "They were as white as the countenance of Jesus" (3 Nephi 19:25)





"It did seem unto them like a transfiguration" (3 Nephi 28:15)  
 "The glory of God was upon Moses" (Moses 1:2)  
 "I beheld the heavens open, and I was clothed upon with glory" (Moses 7:3-4)

Many other scriptures illustrate glory and light being associated with heavenly visitations. The Psalmist wrote, "The heavens declare the glory of God." (Psalms 19:1).



- 9 - **sore afraid - "Literally 'feared with a great fear' "** (The Gospel According to Luke: I-IX, The Anchor-Yale Bible Commentary, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 409). The Codex Sinaiticus replaced the phrase "sore afraid" with "afraid with great fear". This fear may not necessarily be the type of fear we readily relate to. The Apostle, Bruce R. McConkie clarified, "**Sore afraid - holy fear, the fear of the Lord**" (The Mortal Messiah, Volume 1, Bruce R. McConkie, page 226). It is a reverence and deep respect. It is not a fear that he will harm us, but rather a fear of our own lack of worthiness to stand in divine presence. It is an extreme humility before Him. It is this fear of the Lord that drives us to be better than we are today. It is this fear that brings us to our knees. It causes us to admit our weaknesses and seek out His redeeming love. Isaiah wrote, "**Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee... Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee.**" (Isaiah 60:1,5).

In spite of the fact that the word fear is translated to mean reverence and respect for deity, it would only be natural to have emotions of actual fear with such an extraordinary occurrence. Most people never experience the actual appearance of a heavenly being. The appearance and glory would have been amazing, but I would imagine one's first thought might be "why are they here, and am I in trouble?" We are left to speculate, but the angel does calm the shepherds by saying, "fear not".

See the commentary for the word "fear" in Chapter 3, footnote #22, Chapter 4, footnote #26, Chapter 5, footnote #46, Chapter 7, footnote #27, and Chapter 8, footnote #33.

- 10 - **fear not** - This command is not an invitation to abandon heavenly fear or the fear of the Lord. Angels would never welcome a shedding of heavenly respect and reverence. This was an invitation to abandon human fear. It was an invitation to believe and have faith in something greater. If the shepherd's feared because of their own inadequacies and imperfections, the angel brought them something that would dispel their fear. He was bringing good tidings. What is the good news? A Redeemer was being born. The promised Savior that would take away the sins of all those that call themselves His children. We need not fear, only believe.
- 11 - **good tidings** - The Codex Sinaiticus replaced the word "good" with "glad". The word tidings is an old word not used in modern English. It means news. Interesting, since the word "gospel" means "good news". Not a surprise. The word for gospel is translated from the Greek word "εὐαγγελίζω" or "euaggelizō". The word "good tidings" in this word is translated from the same Greek word as "Gospel". They are one and the same. See also the commentary in Chapter 2, footnote #42.

Every time the Lord calls a prophet, or the heavens are opened, good tidings are declared. Alma taught in the America's, "... I would say somewhat unto you concerning the coming of Christ. Behold, I say unto you, that it is he that surely shall come to take away the sins of the world; yea, he cometh to declare glad tidings of salvation unto his people." (Alma 39:16). This is the Glad Tiding! Jesus has atoned for our sins. We need not fear spiritual death. We need not fear our imperfections, but rather embrace the good news, which is His redeeming ordinances.



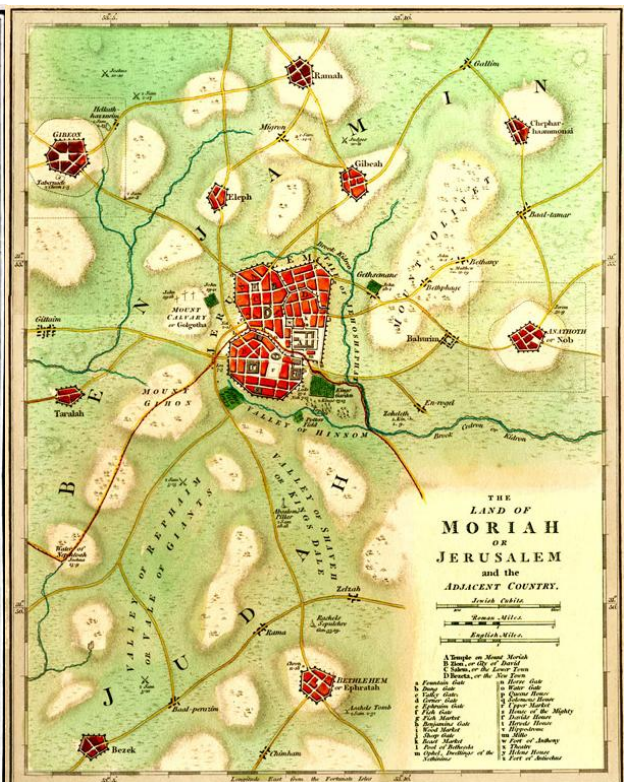
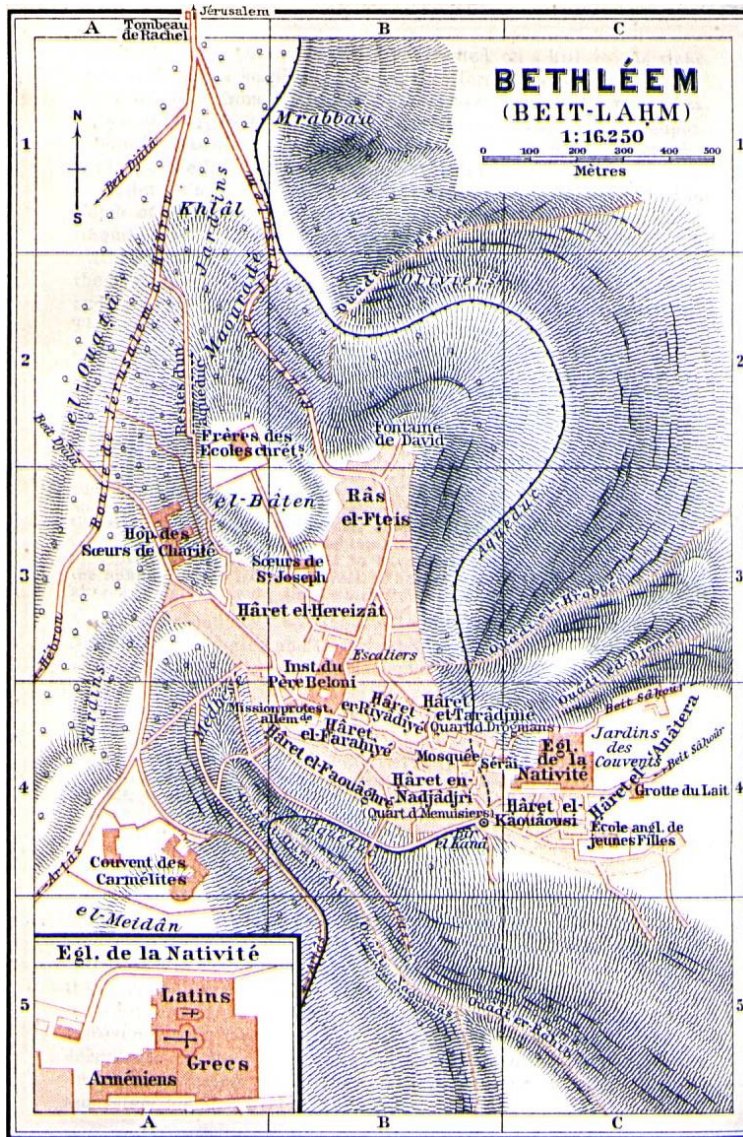
When the Lord sent out missionaries in the early days of the restorations, and even today, He issues a very specific direction. That is that we preach the "good news" of repentance and salvation. One of the early missionaries in the church was Jared Carter. When the Lord called him He said, "**Verily I say unto you, that it is my will that my servant Jared Carter should go again into the eastern countries, from place to place, and from city to city, in the power of the ordination wherewith he has been ordained, proclaiming glad tidings of great joy, even the everlasting gospel.**" (Doctrine & Covenants 79:1). What does the Lord say the good news is? Well, here is the Lord's definition;

"And this is the gospel, the glad tidings, which the voice out of the heavens bore record unto us—That he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness; That through him all might be saved whom the Father had put into his power and made by him; Who glorifies the Father, and saves all the works of his hands, except those sons of perdition who deny the Son after the Father has revealed him. Wherefore, he saves all except them—they shall go away into everlasting punishment, which is endless punishment, which is eternal punishment, to reign with the devil and his angels in eternity, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched, which is their torment—" (Doctrine & Covenants 76:40).

- 12 - **all people** - Who does the good news of the Gospel pertain too? "**Not just to the Jews, not just to the house of Israel, not merely to a favored few - the glad tidings of salvation were to go to all the ends of the earth; every ear should hear, every eye see, and every heart penetrated.**" (Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Bruce R. McConkie, page 97). None of God's children are to be denied the His good news. His good news is not just hearing, but the opportunity to partake. Every single person born on this earth will have an opportunity to partake of the blessings of the atonement through all the saving ordinances made possible through Jesus. This is His work, and whether a person hears the good news in mortality or the life hereafter, everyone will hear. "**Our Father's plan provides for redemption from the Fall through the atonement of Jesus Christ. As the Only Begotten Son of God and the only sinless person to live on this earth, he made a perfect atonement for all mankind. It applies to everyone unconditionally as it pertains to the resurrection from temporal, or physical, death, for all shall rise from the dead with immortal bodies as a result of the Atonement. However, the Atonement is conditional as it pertains to each person's individual sins. It touches everyone to the degree that he or she has faith in Jesus Christ, repents, and obeys the gospel. Exaltation and eternal life with God are reserved for those who keep the commandments.**" (General Conference, "Answers to Life's Questions", M. Russell Nelson, April 1995).
- 13 - **city of David - "Bethlehem, where David was born."** (Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Bruce R. McConkie, page 97). See also the commentary on Bethlehem found in Chapter 9, footnote #23. Bethlehem lies 72 miles as the crow flies from Nazareth. The most direct route from Nazareth is 92 miles by land. In relation to Jerusalem, Bethlehem is just over 4 miles south of the ancient city, of course modern day Jerusalem has grown make the distance between the two much less.



# maps OF BETHLEHEM



The prophets have been clear that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. The Shepherds were godly men and would have known the prophecy. Micah taught, "But thou, Beth-lehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." (Micah 5:2) **The prophecy was herein being fulfilled.**

- 14- **Saviour** - See also the commentary in Chapter 5, footnote #36. The word "Saviour", an old English spelling for "Savior". It is translated from the Greek word "σωτήρ" or "sōtēr". It means one who delivers, preserves or saves. Bruce R. McConkie puts it like this, "The one who would work out the infinite and eternal atonement bringing immortality as a free gift to all (thus saving them from the temporal effects of the fall of Adam) and bringing eternal life to those who would hearken to his teachings (thus saving them from the spiritual fall)." (Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Bruce R. McConkie, page 97). This was the expected role of the Messiah. Judaea was waiting for a Savior. Unfortunately, they saw their enemy as the Romans, when in reality their greatest enemy was sin.
- 15- **Christ** - The word "Christ" means anointed. The word is actually a Title. The Messiah was anointed to work out the Salvation of mankind; hence He is the Anointed One. The Greek word for Christ is "Χριστός" or "Christos". It is the Hebrew equivalent for the word "מָשִׁיחַ" or "mashiach". We know the Hebrew word as "Messiah".

## משיח

Since the Angel declared to shepherds that the Messiah was being born, it is worth discussing the relationship between a shepherd's work and the word Messiah. The Hebrew word comes from the root mashahh meaning "to smear" as in Jeremiah 22:14 where it is usually translated as "painted". In the ancient world, olive oil was a very versatile commodity. It was used in cooking as well as a medicine as it is a disinfectant, no shepherd was without a flask of olive oil which he smeared on his sheep's injuries. The verb mashahh is also translated as "anointed", as in Exodus 29:7, in the sense of smearing olive oil on the head. This ceremony was performed on anyone becoming a King, Priest or Prophet in the service of Yahweh. From the root mashahh comes the noun meshiahh literally meaning "one who is smeared with olive oil for office of authority" or, as it is usually translated, "anointed". This word is also used for any "one who holds an office of authority" (such as a king or priest) even if that person was not ceremonially smeared with oil. A good example of this is Cyrus, the King of Persia. While he was not ceremonially smeared with oil, he was one of authority who served Yahweh through his decree allowing Israel



to return to Jerusalem. The Shepherds carried olive oil and anointed the lambs to heal their wounds. The Messiah was anointed to do the same. He was called to heal our wounds and open the doors of eternal life.

**16 - sign** - The word "sign" is translated from the Greek word "σημεῖον" or "sêmeion". It means a sign, mark, or token that distinguished or identifies something from something else. The word "sign" was not used as proof of fulfilled prophecy; though there were many prophesies fulfilled by Jesus' birth. Bruce R. McConkie stated, **"The swaddling clothes and the manger were not a 'sign' which would identify Jesus; the angel was merely describing where he was and how he was dressed."** (Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Bruce R. McConkie, page 97). Basically, the Angel was directing the shepherds and telling them how they would recognize Jesus.

**17 - Swaddling Clothes** - **"Bands of cloth commonly wrapped around newborn infants."** (Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Bruce R. McConkie, page 97). History records mothers swaddling their infants as far back as 4,000BCE. Though we have no proof, it is quite possible that Eve swaddled her children. In biblical times, babies were swaddled by washing and salting their skin and then wrapping them in linen or cotton bandages four or five inches wide and five to six yards long. The baby's legs would be together and his arms would be at his sides. Some cultures placed the strip across the chin and forehead also, while others bound their children using a combination of cloth and a cradle board or a cloth and strips that were tied to hold the cloth and the child's limbs in place. It was believed by some cultures that children needed to be swaddled for their first year or their limbs would not develop properly. An unwaddled child was also considered abandoned by his parents. The Codex Sinaiticus replaced the phrase **"wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger"** with **"Swathed in a stall"**.



Swaddling has special meaning to a shepherd. While swaddling "cloths" were used in the handling of newborn babies, swaddling "bands" (as referenced in Job 38:9) were used for subduing animals prior to sacrifice. These "swaddling bands" were strips of gauze-like cloth used to restrain a lamb being prepared for inspection before sacrifice to prevent thrashing that they not "blemish" themselves. These shepherds are believed to be priestly shepherds who prepared animals for sacrifice. A sacrifice had to be "bound" (Hebrew 'aqad) in order to be valid. "Binding" an animal for sacrifice is the Hebrew "akeida" specifically mentioned in Abraham's "binding" of Isaac for sacrifice to the Almighty in Genesis 22:9 (this particular sacrifice was, of course, never executed). The binding of anything is symbolic of a covenant. The tense used in the original Greek of Luke 2:12 shows that Jesus will be found "having been swaddled" without any indication of what that "swaddling" consisted of. So, it is not a stretch to see the newborn Jesus in the sign of "the manger" of the birthing cave of Migdal Eder "having been swaddled" in the bands used on the "tamyi" lambs brought there for inspection before sacrifice. The symbolism is magnificent, and the shepherds would have seen the swaddling clothes and manger in a totally different light. They would have recognized him as the Great and Final Sacrificial Lamb.

See also the commentary in Chapter 10, footnote #5.

**18 - manger** - A Manger is a feed trough for animals. In Bible times, mangers in fertile areas were made from clay mixed with straw or from stones held together with mud, or in area with little top soil and vegetation they were carved in natural outcroppings of rock. Many believe that the Savior was laid in a manger like the one to the right.

The Codex Sinaiticus replaces the word "manger" with the word "stall". This may be correct since the Greek word used to translate manger can also be translated as stall. I prefer manger, because of the symbolism. The temple shepherd's would swaddle the sacred ewes and place them in the mangers to keep them safe. Since Jesus was the Lamb of God, it would appear that the symbols for sacrificial Lambs were followed for His birth. It also clearly identified Him for what he was to the priestly shepherds who were familiar with the Jewish rites.



See also the commentary in Chapter 10, footnote #6.

**19 - heavenly host** - **"There is now not one angel, but many. The whole heavens resounds. The music, written by celestial fervor, rings from one end of heaven to the other. They praise the Lord. They sing of His goodness and grace."** (The Mortal Messiah, Volume 1, Bruce R. McConkie, page 226). This is the event that WE had waited for since the beginning of time. We anticipated Christ's birth while we lived in the pre-mortal realm. We knew how necessary Jesus' mission was. John the Beloved saw the pre-mortal hosts and the presentation of the plan for our mortality. He wrote, **"And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?"** (Revelation 5:1-2). The book represented the seven dispensations of the earth. It represents our mortality. It is the plan for our happiness. But as John was told, there was a problem. The Book was sealed. The plan of happiness could not be fulfilled, not without someone that could fulfill it. John observed that there was no one qualified to fulfill the plan of our happiness. He said, **"And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon."** (Revelation 5:3-4). We were there. We were the angels of heaven. None of us were qualified or capable to fulfill the requirements for the Plan of Happiness. Could you imagine our sorrow? I imagine we also wept at the thought of not progressing. An angel taught John, **"And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof."** (Revelation 5:5). Jesus came forth. He was worthy and capable. He was our elder brother. He was amazing, even then. He would be the Savior, by His own choice. The Father of all announced, **"But, behold, my Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning, said unto me—Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever."** (Moses 4:2). Jesus would fulfill the Plan of Happiness. We would progress and have opportunity for exaltation. And then WE sang. We praised God and His Son. The Hosts of Heaven sang. And how many were there? John records, **"And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."** (Revelation 5:11-12).





# ARTIST RENDITIONS OF THE HOST OF HEAVEN APPEARING TO THE SHEPHERDS



The Shepherds of Bethlehem were receiving the greatest announcement that mortals have ever received. The same Jesus of our pre-mortal existence had entered mortality. The Hosts of Heaven were the same host of angels that knew Him there. It is written, **"Thus saith the Lord your God, even Jesus Christ, the Great I Am, Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the same which looked upon the wide expanse of eternity, and all the seraphic hosts of heaven, before the world was made;"** (Doctrine & Covenants 38:1).

- 20 - on earth peace, good will to all men** - Probably one of the best known phrases among Christians today. It brings a melody to one's mind. Unfortunately, the scriptural translation is poor and conveys questionable doctrine. The birth of Jesus Christ absolutely brought peace, but only to those who were willing to accept it. As Isaiah so plainly stated, **"There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."** (Isaiah 57:21). Bruce R. McConkie clarifies, **"Marginal readings give what is probably a more accurate translation of the 'Gloria in excelsis' song: 'On earth peace among men of good will' or, 'On earth peace among men in whom he is well pleased.'"** (Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Bruce R. McConkie, page 97).

The disparity reflects a dispute about the Greek text of the New Testament involving a single letter. The Greek text accepted by most modern scholars today uses the phrase "ἐπι γῆς εἰρήνη ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας" or "epi gēs eirēnē en anthrōpois eudokias", literally **"on earth peace to men of good will"**, with the last word being a Semitic idiom that reads strangely in Greek. Most ancient manuscripts of the Greek New Testament have this reading, probably because it was just difficult to translate without a clear understanding of Semitic words. The original version of the ancient Codex Sinaiticus has this reading, but it has been altered by erasure of the last letter to "epi gēs eirēnē en anthrōpois eudokias", literally "on earth (first subject: peace) to men (second subject: good will)". Expressed in English, this gives the familiar "Peace on earth, good will to men" of many ancient Christmas carols. Even though some other ancient Greek manuscripts (and many medieval ones) agree with the edited Codex Sinaiticus, most modern scholars and Bible translators accept the reading of the majority of ancient manuscripts, translating as "on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests" (NIV) or "on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased" (ESV). The Douay-Rheims Bible, translated from the Latin Vulgate, derives from the same Greek text as the original Codex Sinaiticus, but renders it **"on earth peace among men of his good pleasure."** In the New American Bible, this is updated to **"on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."**

To truly understand the phrase, one needs to start with peace. What is this peace that Jesus would bring? Most people think peace is the defeat of our enemies in war, resulting in the absence of war. Indirectly, I suppose this is true; however, this is not the peace that Jesus directly brings. In mortality, he did not lead an army against Rome, nor did he wage any war as we would define it. The Apostle, Dallin H. Oaks taught, **"...Each citizen furthers the cause of world peace when he or she keeps the commandments of God and lives at peace with family and neighbors.... The Savior and his Apostles had no program for world peace other than individual righteousness....By preaching righteousness, our missionaries seek to treat the causes of war. They preach repentance from personal corruption, greed, and oppression because only by individual reformation can we overcome corruption and oppression by groups or nations. By inviting all to repent and come unto Christ, our missionaries are working for peace in this world by changing the hearts and behavior of individual men and women."** (General Conference, "World Peace", Dallin H. Oaks, April 1990). Jesus' peace is an internal peace. It is an offer to repent of one's sins. The conflict and burden of sin can be removed, and peace can enter one's soul. This is a peace that only Jesus can give. We can receive this peace in NO other way. The Psalmist wrote, **"The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace."** (Psalms 29:11).

The peace that comes through Jesus' atonement is offered to all men, that much is an eternal truth. However, peace will only come to those that partake of the atonement and repent. It is those who find His good favor. Even so, there are none that are excluded from the offer. Agency is our only obstacle. We must choose to have His peace. He will not force it upon us.

- 21 - let us now go** - This was the shepherd's response. It shows their righteousness. Immediate obedience. There was no questioning. Should we go? Is it true? No, they simply said, let us go. It is reminiscent of Nephi who said, **"...I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them."** (1st Nephi 3:7). So they left to find the Babe.
- 22 - came with haste and found** - So, the shepherds left in haste. Which means that they left in a hurry. They wasted no time. The angel had spoken and the command was taken as urgent. Who did they find? The Codex Sinaiticus adds the word "both" between "found" and "Mary and Joseph". And of course, they found the infant Messiah. There was most probably no need for the angels to give these shepherds directions to the birth place because they already knew. These were the men who raised sacrificial lambs that were sacrificed in the Temple. When the angelic announcement came, they knew exactly where to go, as Luke 2 indicates, for the sign of the manger could only mean the manger laid in one of birthing caves reserved for the birth of sacrificial lambs. You cannot explain the meaning or direction of the sign they were given or their response unless you have the right manger, the right shepherds and the proper Hebraic perspective. And then, everything makes sense.

Modern Day Bethlehem with the Country Side in the Background





## ARTISTIC RENDERINGS OF THE SHEPHERDS MEETING THE INFANT SAVIORS



**23 - known abroad** - The Codex Sinaiticus replaces the word "**abroad**" with the word "**concerning**". The priestly shepherds had a very important task. They protected the sheep. They assured that the conditions for these special sheep were ceremonially clean. They followed the law to assure that the sacrifices would be acceptable before the Lord. Above all of this, they bore testimony to the worthiness of the Lambs. This was paramount for those that were seeking atonement. As Jesus entered mortality, the priestly shepherds came and saw. They received a witness of the spirit, and they left to do what they had always been called to do. They testified that they had beheld the Lamb of God. They testified that He was born according to all prophecies they had studied. He was the real deal. They knew it, and they were qualified to testified of it.

**24 - kept all these things** - So, the shepherds testified, but Mary kept these things in her heart and pondered them. Isn't it interesting that the Lord's plan has different servants called to fill different roles. Mary was called to be the Mother of Jesus. Humble and soft, non-assuming and sweet, Mary did not go forth and spread the news of the Messiah's birth. She fulfilled her role. She swaddled him. She loved him, and cared for him. The world would minimize the role of women, but heaven help us when this role is not fulfilled. "**Of all the creations of the Almighty, there is none more beautiful, none more inspiring than a lovely daughter of God who walks in virtue with an understanding of why she should do so, who honors and respects her body as a thing sacred and divine, who cultivates her mind and constantly enlarges the horizon of her understanding, who nurtures her spirit with everlasting truth.**" ("Our Responsibility to Our Young Women," Ensign, Gordon B. Hinckley, Sept. 1988, page 11). And so Mary kept these things, and strengthened her testimony as she fulfilled her divine assignment.



**25 - shepherds returned** - They returned to their flocks. They returned to their jobs. Even so, they could not have returned the same. They knew what had happened. They had experienced heaven. They had a witness that few mortals had every received. They were special witnesses of the Savior's birth into mortality. Yet, they returned and just like all of us were left to work out their exaltation through the Savior they had just beheld.



