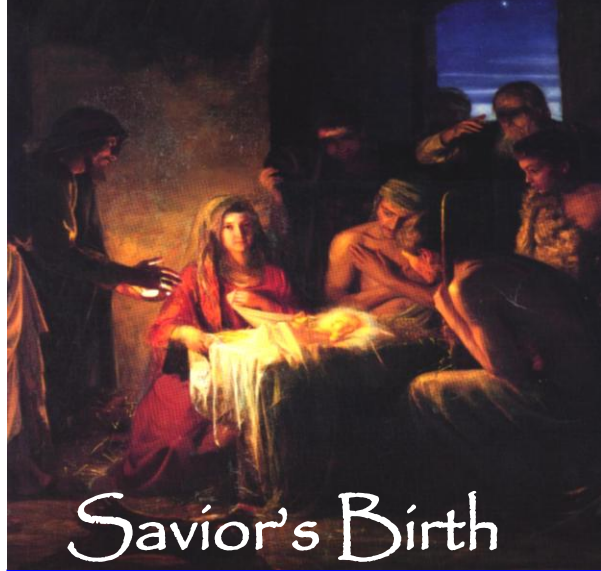


The Story of the

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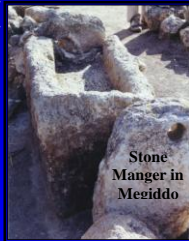
Savior's Birth

“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes.” Swaddling clothes are simply strips of cloth, similar to bandages, that were tightly wrapped around a newborn child. A lot can be learned about a child's social class by the swaddling clothes used. The elite would use swaddling clothes of great splendor and costs. Such clothes might be fine linen woven with pure gold thread, or cloth of brilliant color such as purple and blue. The poor, on the other hand, would use wide strips of common cloth. The practice of wrapping an infant in strips of cloth might seem odd to our society; however, it is a practice that is still done in the East. It is believed that newborn baby's limbs are fragile and pliable. For this reason a mother would set the arms and legs of the infant in a proper position and then wrap the baby tightly to assure that the bones are set in the proper position. The tightness of the wrap gives the infant the feeling of tightness experienced in the womb and often brings calmness and comfort. It was this loving act that Mary performed for the baby Jesus, **“and laid him in a manger.”** The word ‘manger’ is derived from the Greek word ‘φύρνη’. It is sometimes translated in the Bible as ‘manger’ and other times as ‘stall’. A manger is a trough used for the



Alleged Birth spot of Jesus

feeding of animals. In westernized nativity scenes, the manger of Christ is one of wood and straw. The reality of the story is that Near Eastern mangers were typically of stone. A stone feed trough became the crib of the Savior of



Stone Manger in Mesjidlo



Stone Manger in Mesjidlo

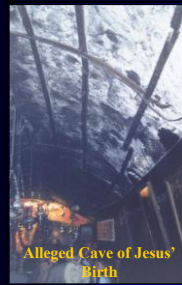


the world. This was done **“because there was no room for them in the inn.”** “The Eastern inn or ‘caravanserai’ bears no resemblance to the inns with which we are acquainted. There various kinds of these oriental inns, some being a small, rude resting place, such as mentioned in Jeremiah 9:2, while others are capacious and comparatively comfortable. Such an inn presents, at a distance the appearance of a fortress, being a quadrangular building about a hundred yards long on each side of the square, having a wall about twenty feet high. An arched gateway, surmounted by a tower, open into a large court, surrounded by a platform, on the level of which are the traveler's rooms. These rooms were not furnished, each traveler being expected to provide for himself everything but actual shelter. He must carry his own bedding, provisions, and cooking utensils. In case of sickness the porter in attendance may minister to his wants...The horses, camels, and baggage are placed in the extensive court, in the center of which is a fountain. Sometimes, however, there are stables formed of covered avenues, extending between the rear wall of the lodging rooms and the external wall of the caravanserai...These stables are on a level with the court, and thus below the level of the platform on which the travelers' apartments (Manners and Customs of the Bible, James M. Freeman).” Many believe that Jesus was born in such a stable; however, most believe that the

Savior's stable was not associated with an inn at all. Since the inn was supposedly full, the stables associated with it would have also been full. Many suppose that Mary and Joseph sought refuge in one of the many natural stables that dot the Judean countryside. Shepherds of the area often used natural caves as stables for their sheep. These caves were often used as the main structure for many ancient homes, especially in small towns. James E. Talmage wrote, “The shelter within which Jesus was born was that of one of the numerous limestone cave which abound the region, and which are still used by travelers as resting places. Canon Farrar said, ‘In Palestine it not infrequently happens that the entire khan, or at any rate a portion of it in which the animals are housed, is one of those innumerable caves which abound in the limestone rocks of its central hills...’ (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 106)” What ever the exact circumstances were, they were at best humble. At or around the time of the Savior's birth it is recorded, **“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.”** Shepherds are the forefathers of the modern day Bedouins. They are nomadic people who occupy the wilderness and desert areas of the Near East. They have no permanent homes and travel with makeshift tents wherever grazing can be found for their sheep, goats, and other livestock. They live simple lives that are crucially dependant on the lives of their animals.



Natural Caves in Shiloh



Alleged Cave of Jesus' Birth

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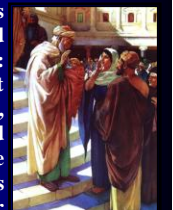
Shepherd's field near Bethlehem



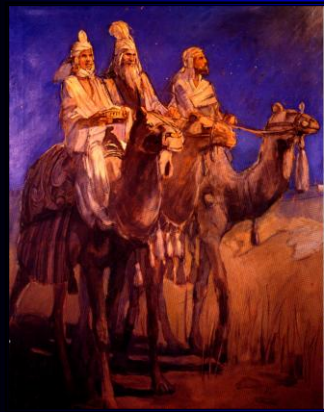
It would not have been abnormal for shepherds to be tending sheep late into the evening and early morning at the birth of Jesus. Such was and is the life of a Bedouin. **“And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”** The term ‘Saviour’ is the Greek word for the Hebrew word ‘Messiah’. It means anointed one. The first letter in the word ‘Messiah’ is the Hebrew ‘מ’. It is the equivalent of our ‘M’ and is made up of two Hebrew letters, ‘ו’ and ‘כ’. The letter ‘ו’ was originally a hieroglyph representing a nail or stake. The letter ‘כ’ was also originally a hieroglyph. It represented the palm of the hand or a hand in cupping shape. Hence the letter ‘מ’, which was always connected with the word ‘Messiah’ or ‘משיח’ is symbolic of a nail in the palm of the hand. The angel bore testimony of Jesus role as Savior and told the shepherds **“And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. 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 even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.”** Jesus was born on April 6th. **“And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered”,** or marveled **“at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered”,** or meditated on, **“them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.”** The offering of doves or pigeons was often the offering of the poor. Many assume this to indicate Mary and Joseph's financial status. **“And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after**



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the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now testest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.” Despite the western tradition that the wise men visited the Christ child on the night of his birth, we find no mention of it in Luke’s account. Matthew is the only Gospel writer to mention the wise men, and he doesn’t state that they visited in a stable, but rather that they came into the ‘house’ of Mary and Joseph. We assume that the wise men arrived sometime after his birth. Matthew records, **“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem.”** These wise

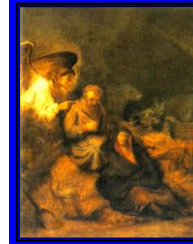


men are often referred to as ‘Magi’. Magi stems from the Greek word ‘Magos’. Our English word ‘magic’ derives from this word. The word ‘wise men’ is translated from this same word which can also be translated as fortune tellers, astronomers, court astrologers, magicians or Zoroaster priests of Persia who studied and interpreted signs in the sky. The wise men of the Christmas story could have been descendants of schooled Jews still in

Babylon after the exile (Daniel 1:20, 2:20). It’s recorded that Daniel’s was made chief of the Babylonian wise men after correctly interpreting Nebuchadnessar’s dream (Daniel 2:48). The Magi might have come from the Mesopotamia or Arabian area, but probably from the rising Parthian Empire (centered around the current nations of Iran and Afghanistan), which basically encompassed the old Mede, Persian, and Babylonian empires. The Parthian Empire bordered the Roman Empire and was never successfully conquered by the Romans. The Parthian Magi did many things, among which they were instrumental in the choosing of Parthian kings. Jeremiah 39:1-14 refers to Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag (or chief magi) in Nebuchadnezzar’s court, whom was instrumental in getting Jeremiah out of Babylonian prison. Some

see Isaiah 60:3,6 as prophesy of the coming wise men. If these were Parthian Magi, they were King makers, then Herod, who had been crowned King of the Jews by Caesar Augustus himself, would have obviously reacted with concern. Another possibility that may have troubled Herod was they quite probably would have been traveling with a small army since they were carrying valuables through bandit infested wilderness and entering in to Roman territory, while Herod’s forces were probably occupied in conducting Caesar’s census. Biblically, little is told of the wise men. In fact, we don’t even know how many there were. In the 6th century was the first recorded mention of the Magi as 3 Kings and named: Balthasar or Balthazar - 40 year old King of Ethiopia bringing myrrh and Melchior - 40 year old King of Arabia bringing gold, Caspar or Gaspar- 20 year old King of Tarsus bringing frankincense. They’re usually depicted with Balthasar in red with gold from Asia, Melchior in green with myrrh from Europe, and Caspar in blue with incense from Africa. This would make only Balthasar coming from the east, Melchior would be from the northwest and Caspar from the southwest. Many assume that there were three wise men since there were three gifts. The Kings’ bodies were supposedly found and taken to Constantinople in the 3rd or 5th century and then taken to Milan after the 1st Crusade and currently in a Cathedral in Cologne, Germany. One can see that much has been added to the biblical account. Matthew continued the story by recording the wise men’s words to Herod, **“Saying, is he that is born of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to him.”** The star in the east is one of the best known symbols of Jesus’ birth. Many associate it with the shepherd’s, however, it more specifically mentioned in relation to the wise men. There is much speculation as to what stellar occurrence caused the new star in the east to appear. Many have examined charts and come up with such theories as the alignment of all the planets. One theory that is worth mentioning is the Chinese astronomy records from the time of Christ, which record a long tailed comet that hugged the western horizon and was visible from March 9th to May 4th, 5 BC. Given the fact that Jesus was born on April 6th, this has some interest. Even so, Elder Talmage placed the birth of Jesus in 1 BC. **“When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense,”** (Frankincense is a ‘fragrant resinous exudation of various species of Boswellia; it was imported into Judaea from Arabia. It was an ingredient in the holy incense for sacrificial purposes and was a highly valued perfume.)

“and myrrh.” (Myrrh was used in preparation of the holy ointment; in the purification of women; perfume; embalming; etc. It was obtained from various species of thorny shrubs in the dry districts of Arabia and Eastern Africa... It was most commonly the gum of the thorny rose. **“And being warned of God in a dream**



that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod”, which is recorded to have happened in Jericho in Herod’s winter palace. He had become so paranoid about losing his power, that not only did he order the death of all small children who might fit the criteria for the Christ child, but he kill several of his own children and wives. Augustus said of Herod, ‘It is better to be one of Herod’s pigs, than one of his sons’ Joseph was asked to take Jesus away from Herod that his life might be spared, but also **“that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,**



In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.” Rachel was the wife of Jacob, who became Israel. She was the matriarch of the family. Her tomb is in Rama which is almost a part of Bethlehem it is so close. Herod, in his great wickedness, ordered the death of all infant males less than 2 years of age. The mothers of Israel mourned the loss of their children. Matthew records the angels words which quote Jeremiah 31:15. Most feel that the visit of the wise men was closer to the Savior’s second birthday since Herod used the age of 2 as his bench mark for finding the Savior. The age of the Savior was obtained from the wise men. How they knew his age is not given. At any rate, the Savior was protected as the young family sought refuge in Egypt. **“But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child’s life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene (Matthew 2:1-23).”**