

CHRISTMAS – SIMPLE FOLK

INTRODUCTION

Last time we looked at the preparation that had to be done in order for Christ to enter the world as a person.

We looked at some of the treasures found in this part of Scripture that we, as a group, have tended to reject due to the pagan influences of this world.

We saw the amazing preparation that God went into to prepare for this event which was planned before time began and we touched on some of the almost 360 prophecies in the Old Testament.

We saw how this event determined our numbering of years and history and is the pivotal point in God's timeline.

We looked at how God sent an angel to announce Christ's birth to the world, via the High Priestly line and the how He deals differently with learned people and simple folk.

Then, we saw how a simple country girl with an important and planned lineage agreed to bear the only male ever child born without an earthly father. Her simple faith, her amazing courage and her Spirit-filled beautiful words almost bring us to tears. And we saw the wonderful support network that God had planned and provided for her.

They were all just simple folk.

Today, we will look at more simple folk and how God used them in so many different ways to bring His plan to fruition. Simple folk living simple lives but bringing about the most important event in History.

We saw that Luke told his story from the point of view of Mary and, as a doctor, was totally in touch with the human side of Christ. He adds small details that he could have only known from having personal contact with the people involved.

Matthew tells his part of the story from the point of view of the Jews, the Law and the Old Scriptures. It is man's story with the emphasis on men,

GENEALOGY

But while we are looking at simple folk, Matthew slams into us from the very outset with the genealogy of a King.

Make no mistake, while all these people were simple folk, they were dealing with a king and Matthew makes this totally clear from the beginning. This story may have taken place in the hills and a stable, but this is a king we are talking about, the King of the Jews, the King of all the earth, the King of the Universe.

Mat 1:1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, *the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

Mat 1:2 Abraham fathered Isaac, and Isaac fathered Jacob, and Jacob fathered Judah and his brothers.

Mat 1:3 And Judah fathered Pharez and Zarah of Tamar. And Pharez fathered Hezron, and Hezron fathered Ram,

Mat 1:4 and Ram fathered Amminadab, and Amminadab fathered Nahshon, and Nahshon fathered Salmon.

Mat 1:5 And Salmon fathered Boaz of Rahab, and Boaz fathered Obed of Ruth, and Obed fathered Jesse,

Mat 1:6 and Jesse fathered David the king. And David the king fathered Solomon of *her who had been* wife of Uriah.

Mat 1:7 And Solomon fathered Rehoboam, and Rehoboam fathered Abijah, and Abijah fathered Asa.

Mat 1:8 And Asa fathered Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat fathered Jehoram, and Jehoram fathered Uzziah.

Mat 1:9 And Uzziah fathered Jotham, and Jotham fathered Ahaz, and Ahaz fathered Hezekiah.

Mat 1:10 And Hezekiah fathered Manasseh, and Manasseh fathered Amon, and Amon fathered Josiah.

Mat 1:11 And Josiah fathered Jehoiachin and his brothers, at the time they were carried away to Babylon.

Mat 1:12 And after the carrying away to Babylon, Jehoiachin fathered Shealtiel, and Shealtiel fathered Zerubbabel.

Mat 1:13 And Zerubbabel fathered Abiud, and Abiud fathered Eliakim, and Eliakim fathered Azor.

Mat 1:14 And Azor fathered Sadoc, and Sadoc fathered Achim, and Achim fathered Eliud.

Mat 1:15 And Eliud fathered Eleazar, and Eleazar fathered Matthan, and Matthan fathered Jacob.

Mat 1:16 And Jacob fathered Joseph, the husband *to be* of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

Interestingly enough, for a man's book, Matthew includes three women whose stories tell of God's love and righteousness .

Then Matthew points out the numerology and the pattern of the list of generations.

Mat 1:17 So all the generations from Abraham to David *are* fourteen generations. And from David until the carrying away into Babylon, fourteen generations. And from the carrying away into Babylon until Christ, fourteen generations.

God's patterns in time and nature and the heavens are a totally absorbing study in itself... but for another day.

JOSEPH

BETROTHAL

Mat 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was this way (for His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph)

Luke tells us the same thing.

Luke 1:27 He had a message for a young woman promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. Her name was Mary.

The Jewish custom of betrothal at the time was quite different from ours and there is such a wealth of symbolism hidden in this process which Jesus refers to in his picturing of His relationship with us in terms of the Bride of Christ.

A betrothed couple were all but married in the legal and social sense except that the bridegroom had to provide a place for her to live before he could actually claim his conjugal rights.

However, the husband was free to break off the betrothal if there was suspected infidelity. But

before they came together, she was found to be with child by *the Holy Spirit*.

Notice how Matthew immediately protects her chastity by including the detail “by the Holy Spirit”.

POOR OLD JOSEPH

What a turmoil he must have gone through! Maybe he just didn't believe Mary about the Holy Spirit stuff. Can't say I blame him. It is a bit hard to believe even from where we are standing. Can you imagine how he must have felt? Apart from the personal anguish of the perceived betrayal, there was the social stigma of the whole thing. Gossip travels faster than an e-mail and the whole village would have known in an instant and gossips can be savage. Maybe Mary was a nut case and he was relieved about what he had been spared.

One can attribute all sorts of emotions to Joseph but we are told that he was a just or righteous man

Mat 1:19 But Joseph, her husband *to be*, being just,

And, although, totally entitled to break the engagement under.

Deu 22:20 But if this thing is true and tokens of virginity are not found for the girl,

Deu 22:21 then they shall bring the girl out to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones so that she dies, because she has done foolishness in Israel to play the harlot in her father's house. So you shall put evil away from among you.

He was

and not willing to make her a public example, he purposed to put her away secretly.

What a telling verse this is. It shows what an amazing and loving man he was and what a good choice God had made in choosing him to be Jesus' adoptive father.

He could have expressed anger and humiliation or vengeance or any number of emotions normal males express when their pride is wounded, but he considered Mary's situation.

And he was faced with a terrible challenge. Perceived betrayal brings up so many of the "sl" words. Holy Spirit! What is that? How could she? Messiah? Yeah, right!!! What a! What if it is true? Maybe he had sent her to Elizabeth while he got his head together.

Who knows, but they were real people faced with real human problems .

Mat 1:20 And as he thought upon these things,

Such a simple statement that contains so much anguish.... But God was there in the midst of it all, as He always is, if we trust Him and turn to Him and listen to Him and wait for His timing, for

behold, the angel of *the* Lord appeared to him in a dream,

No great angel by an altar or a kindly gentleman who could talk over and comfort a frightened young village girl, but a dream. Joseph was a carpenter, a simple practical man. Dreams were part of his life. He probably woke on many mornings with the solution to one of his design problems revealed "in a dream" during the night. Some folk keep a pad and pencil by the bed to write these revelations or answers down. This is especially true for men as they are more able to access the creative area of their brain while asleep.

God is amazing. He meets every one of us where we are, so that He can take us to where He is.

One assumes it was Gabriel who did the job here as well....

saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take to you Mary *as* your wife. For that in her is fathered of *the* Holy Spirit.

You can almost hear the held breath go out.

Mat 1:21 And she shall bear a son, and you shall call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins.

Luke 1:34 ???

..... and shall call his name Immanuel.

THE NAME.

We all know that His name was not Jesus. Jesus is a Greekified version of the Hebrew name Joshua or Yahushua.

This is vitally important to the Sacred Names people who have a very good case to mount that we should be calling our saviour Yahoshua because

- It is His name
- Hebrew names contain a message or description of the person
- It has major meaning. “Ya means God,
- His name contains the concept of “deliverer” and “he will save”.
- God says not to use His Name in vain
- His name is Yeshua
- You should not use the name Ge-sus because the Ge means earth or soil in Greek, and the sus means swine or pig in Latin, so you are saying "earth pig". Bit tenuous.
- The name of YAHshua has been replaced by the names of G-zeus (Jesus), and Ea-zeus meaning healing zeus (Iesus, and Iesous) which are pagan in origin so we are using the name of Pagan or Satanic sources.

Some say that Jesus came via a shortening process from Yahushua, Yeshua, Jeshu to Iesus and Jesus. The etymology of this transition is totally understandable.

This is a very complex argument with some going as far as saying that those who don't use the Hebrew name (not sure which pronunciation is the correct one) then you are not saved and all the prayers you have ever prayed are invalid.

Others say that we are saved and pray by faith not a magical name.

You work it out.

GOD'S PROOF TEXTS

Now Joseph was a simple village carpenter so, apart from going up to Jerusalem three times each year for Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles, I think we can safely assume that he would not have been conversant with the intricacies of prophesy. I doubt that he could even read. So the angel then explains to Joseph why this must all take place.

Mat 1:22 Now all this happened so that might be fulfilled that *which was* spoken of the LORD by the prophet, saying,

Mat 1:23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive in *her* womb, and will bear a son. And they will call His name Emmanuel," which being interpreted is, God with us.

Well, that explains it all!!! Riiiiight!!

I wonder why we don't use the name Emmanuel now. Nor does Scripture.

ACTION

So Joseph wasted no time.

Mat 1:24 And Joseph, being roused from sleep, did as the angel of *the* Lord commanded him and took his wife,

What a relief for him as he rode, well one assumes he rode, all those miles to Bethlehem. I bet he oscillated between joy and terror. What was he taking on? He did have a legal out if he chose not to go ahead with the deal. After all, as far as the world was concerned, Mary had sinned and he could put her away. This stigma would live with them for the rest of their lives and indeed they threw it in Jesus' face in

Joh 8:41 You do the deeds of your father. Then they said to Him, **We are not born of fornication;** we have one father, *even* God.

It says a lot about him that he took on this monumental task of knowingly raising someone else's baby.

Mat 1:25 and did not know her until she bore her son, the First-born. And he called His name JESUS.

VIRGIN MARY

Some of this world likes to think that Mary was a virgin all her life. I have never really grasped why they need to do this in the face of so much Scriptural evidence to the contrary. We see this in

Mat 12:46 But while He yet talked with the people, behold, *His* mother and His brothers stood outside, desiring to speak with Him.

Mar 3:32 And the crowd sat about Him, and they said to Him, Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking for You.

Luk 8:19 And His mother and *His* brothers came to Him. And they could not come near Him because of the crowd.

Jesus had brothers, it says quite clearly here that Joseph “knew her” after Jesus was born.

This is important as the Roman Catholic Church has held that not only was Mary a virgin when Jesus was born, but she remained a virgin all her life. They explain these siblings as Joseph's from a previous marriage but the Bible says “HER first born”.

OBEDIENCE

So Joseph married Mary, probably in Bethlehem under the auspices of Elizabeth and Zechariah.

Luk 1:56 And Mary stayed with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

This means she went back to Nazareth, to her own house, as a married woman. The locals may not have been able to read but they could surely count and life must have been tough for the young couple as they worked through the monumental issues facing them.

SET IN TIME

So back to Luke. Again Luke sets the time in History.

AUGUSTUS

Luke 2:1 At that time Emperor Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire.

Augustus was the founder of the Roman Empire, as opposed to the Republic, and its first Emperor, ruling from 27 BC until his death in 14 AD.

His reign initiated an era of relative peace known as the *Pax Romana* (*The Roman Peace*) where the Roman world was largely free from large-scale conflict for more than two centuries and most people got a reasonable deal and were free to move about.

This is a vitally important fact because the spread of Christianity could not have taken place without this level of security and peace. Still, it was a harsh world but it worked.

It is also interesting that this is one of the only times in history when there was peace... until He comes again.

QUIRINIUS.

But not all places had total peace. The borders of the Empire were in a bubbling state of rebellion and Judea was known as a hotspot.

Luke 2:2 When this first census took place, Quirinius was the governor of Syria.

In the closing years of the 1st century BCE the Romans placed Judaea under the control of Herod the Great, a client king who could be relied on to serve their interests. Publius Sulpicius Quirinius (51 BCE-21 CE), the governor of Roman Syria, was sent to carry out a census for tax purposes. He is well documented in history.

However, there is confusion around the actual dates that Luke gives us as Quirinius was in office in 6 CE, and King Herod died in 4 BCE. Critics salivate at these “errors” There are complex explanations for this ... but for another time.

REGISTRATION

[Luke 2:3](#) Everyone, then, went to register himself, each to his own hometown.

The Romans took the census for taxation purposes .

Can you imagine the logistics of this with all these people moving about going to their home towns to register, like the Chinese do for Chinese New Year and we do for Christmas? Admittedly, in those days people didn't move far from their native villages but the Romans were notorious for moving people all over the place to reduce the chances of rebellion.

It would appear that every five years, each male Roman citizen had to register in Rome for the census. In this he had to declare his family, wife, children, slaves and riches.

I am not sure what time frame this took but in 2 Sam 24 it took David's men 9 months to take the notorious census in Israel but they went to each town. Here the people came to the Romans (typical), so it makes sense to hold it at the time of Tabernacles as many people would be moving about then.

CITY OF DAVID

[Luk 2:4](#) And Joseph also went up from Galilee to be taxed (out of *the* city of Nazareth, into Judea, to *the* city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of *the* house and family line of David).

Bethlehem is mentioned 52 times in the Bible, (One for each week?) and it has been linked with God's people and His plan since the very beginning.

- It was the first place God's people actually owned land in the Promised Land.

Gen 35:19 And Rachel died and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.

- Ruth came to Bethlehem for safety and in obedience and love

Rth 1:22 And Naomi returned; and Ruth, who was of Moab, her daughter-in-law, was with her, returning out of the fields of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

- David came from Bethlehem.

1Sa 17:58 And Saul said to him, Whose son are you, young man? And David answered, I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem.

- David had his fortress in Bethlehem.

2Sa 23:14 And David *was* then in a stronghold, and the fort of the Philistines *was* then in Bethlehem.

- Most of his men came from the region of Bethlehem
- Rehoboam built the town. I guess he fortified it.
- When Jeremiah escaped Judah before the Babylonians to Egypt, some say on the way to Ireland, they went via Bethlehem.

Jer 41:17 And they departed and lived in the inn of Chimham, which is by Bethlehem, to go to enter into Egypt,

- And of course the famous prophesy of the birth, mission and outcome of Christ's purpose.

Mic 5:2 And you, Bethlehem Ephratah, you being least among the thousands of Judah, out of you He shall come forth to Me, to become Ruler in Israel, He whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from the days of eternity.

Mic 5:3 Therefore He will give them over until the time the one giving birth has given birth; then the rest of His brothers shall return to the sons of Israel.

Mic 5:4 And He shall stand and feed in the strength of Jehovah, in the majesty of the name of Jehovah His God. And they shall sit, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth.

Mic 5:5 And this *One* shall be peace. When Assyria shall come into our land; and when he shall walk in our palaces, then we shall raise against him seven shepherds and eight anointed ones from men.

Mic 5:6 And they shall mar the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod at her own entrances. And He shall deliver us from Assyria when he comes into our land, and when he treads within our border.

Mic 5:7 And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples, as dew from Jehovah, as showers on a blade of the grass, which does not wait for man, nor delay for the sons of men.

Mic 5:8 And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among the flocks of sheep, who, if he goes through, both tramples and tears in pieces. And there is none to snatch back.

Mic 5:9 Your hand shall be high above your foes, and all your enemies shall be cut off.

Mic 5:10 And it shall be in that day, says Jehovah, I will cut off your horses out of your midst, and I will destroy your chariots.

Mic 5:11 And I will cut off the cities of your land, and throw down all your strongholds.

Mic 5:12 And I will cut off sorceries out of your hand, and there shall not be fortune-tellers among you.

Mic 5:13 I will also cut off your graven images, and your pillars out of the midst of you; and you shall never again worship the work of your hands.

Mic 5:14 And I will pluck your shrines out of the midst of you; so I will destroy your cities.

Mic 5:15 And I will execute vengeance in anger and fury *on* the nations, such as they have not heard.

THE JOURNEY.

Luk 2:5 And he took Mary his betrothed wife, being with child.

Interesting here Luke tells us that they are only betrothed, not married as Matthew says. This is another small discrepancy that opponents of the Bible seize on to prove that it is wrong and fake. However, eye witness accounts usually have small discrepancies where people see things differently and stories that are identical in every detail smell of collusion. Besides it did not matter, as in the Jewish law, there was very little difference legally between betrothal and marriage.

Also think of the distance they had to travel to get to Bethlehem. The “as the crow flies” distance is about 170 Kilometres on today’s roads, but Samaria is between the two places so they had to go around the long way. They may have had to go in a caravan for safety. An estimate is that people can travel about 20 K a day on foot so that makes about ten days, give or take, for the journey... in the heat... on a donkey... pregnant.

Well, the traditional picture is that Mary rode on a donkey and Joseph walked. The Bible does not mention this at all but it stands to reason that there was a donkey involved as Joseph would have had to carry his materials and product around.

And there is the delicious link with Jesus riding triumphally into Jerusalem, the City of the Great King, on a donkey on what we know as Palm Sunday

Mat 21:1 And when they drew near Jerusalem, and had come to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, **Mat 21:2** saying to them, Go into the village across from you. And immediately you will find an ass tied, and a colt with her. Untie *them* and bring *them* to Me.

Mat 21:3 And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, The Lord has need of them, and immediately He will send them.

Mat 21:4 All this was done so that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,

Mat 21:5 "Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your King comes to you, meek, and sitting on an ass, even a colt the foal of an ass."

Mat 21:6 And the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them.

Mat 21:7 And they brought the ass, even the colt, and put their clothes on them, and He sat on them.

Mat 21:8 And a very great crowd spread their garments in the way. Others cut down branches from the trees and spread *them* in the way.

Mat 21:9 And the crowds who went before, and those who followed, cried out, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed *is* He who comes in *the* name of *the* Lord! Hosanna in the highest!

Maybe there was donkey. I hope for Mary's sake there was but even that would have been pretty uncomfortable.

YOKES

Other traditions say that Joseph became quite wealthy and was much sort after as a yoke maker, a real talent and skill and much in demand. Jesus, according to tradition, was expert at this too. The statement in

Mat 11:28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Mat 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

Mat 11:30 For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.

This now carries extra weight (sorry) and understanding.

The other aspect is that yokes had to be made specifically for each animal, whether donkey or bullock as all animals are different. Each of us is different and God deals with each of us differently as He draws us closer to Him. The yoke He gives us to bear, fits comfortably as long as we don't buck against it.

SHEPHERDS

We turn to the hills, above Bethlehem

Luke 2:8 There were some shepherds in that part of the country who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks.

Tradition has it that the sheep were sitting in a nice family group around the shepherds on the top of the hill with the bright "Star of Bethlehem" above them. However, there is no mention of hills.

The word used is “camping out”. They were “keeping watch” on their sheep overnight. Usually one of them stayed on watch for wild animals or duffers.

FOLD

The custom was that they had sheep folds, small pens made of stone walls with an open entrance. The shepherd slept across this entrance to protect the sheep from thieves and wild animals. Remember the parable of the Good Shepherd.

Joh 10:1 Truly, truly, I say to you, He who does not enter into the sheepfold by the door, but going up by another way, that one is a thief and a robber.

Joh 10:2 But he who enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

Joh 10:3 The doorkeeper opens to him, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls *his* own sheep by name and leads them out.

Joh 10:4 And when he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him. For they know his voice.

Joh 10:5 And they will not follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.

Joh 10:6 Jesus spoke this parable to them, but they did not understand what it was which He spoke to them.

Joh 10:7 Then Jesus said to them again, Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

Joh 10:8 All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.

Joh 10:9 I am the door. If anyone enters in by Me, he shall be saved and shall go in and out and find pasture.

Joh 10:10 The thief does not come except to steal and to kill and to destroy. I have come so that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly.

Joh 10:11 I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

Joh 10:12 But he who is a hireling and not the shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away. And the wolf catches them and scatters the sheep.

Joh 10:13 The hireling flees, because he is a hireling and does not care for the sheep.

Joh 10:14 I am the Good Shepherd, and I know those that *are* Mine, and I am known by those who are Mine.

Joh 10:15 Even as the Father knows Me, I also know the Father. And I lay down My life for the sheep.

Joh 10:16 And I have other sheep who are not of this fold. I must also lead those, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one flock, one Shepherd.

Joh 10:17 Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I might take it again.

The shepherd made the door with his own body. The shepherd was the door.

HERDS VERSUS FLOCKS

In most Western countries, our concept of raising sheep is that of vast flocks of furry, dusty, daggy animals are crowded together and driven by amazing dogs and men on horses or bikes or helicopters, in front of the shepherd with much noise and whip-cracking and dust.

The way of the Shepherd in the Middle East, even today, is the total opposite. The shepherd leads his sheep and the flock is small enough for him to know each one as an individual with a name. This makes it so much harder to kill them too.

In Israel, we had stopped.. on the top of a hill.. in a small village, to watch a potter using a manual potting wheel which he powered with his feet on a pedal. Outside were a mob of sheep and two men, obviously shepherds, leaning on their sticks just as you see them in the paintings, talking. When the two men moved off, one whistled and the other called some words, and the sheep magically separated into two flocks and walked off after their shepherd. They knew their master and followed him when he called.

They followed in obedience and security. There was no being driven.

So, at night when the shepherds count their sheep into the fold, they know if one is missing and, as the parable says, the shepherd goes to look for it.

Luk 15:3 And He spoke this parable to them, saying,

Luk 15:4 What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after that which is lost until he finds it?

Luk 15:5 And when he has found *it*, he lays *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing.

Luk 15:6 And when he comes home, he calls together *his* friends and neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.

SPECIAL SHEEP

These were not ordinary sheep. The sheep around Bethlehem were intended for the temple and were bred especially to be sacrificed, according to the Mosaic Law.

These sheep were to represent the Messiah in their cleanliness, perfection, and their sacrifice on the altar of the temple. This gives added depth of meaning, if true, to these scriptures which tell of the angels who came to these shepherds to proclaim the birth of the Lamb of God, the Saviour of mankind, who would offer the last and ultimate sacrifice.

MIGDAL EDAR

An interesting exercise for me is that this theory based on some rabbinical teachings which differs markedly from the traditional picture of the birth that I had carried all my life. Initially I read the information from a position of scepticism. However, I have come to see that there may be some basis for reconsidering yet another tradition

There was a tower in this area traditionally known as the Tower of the Flock, or Migdal Edar, which is on the main road, very near Bethlehem. This watch tower from ancient times was used by the shepherds for protection from their enemies and wild beasts. It was the place ewes were brought to give birth to the lambs.

This concept claims that it was actually in this tower that the birth took place and not in the town itself. Mary and Joseph actually chose to go there because they knew the link with prophesy. Then again, maybe she was in labour and had to stop.

There is quite sound “evidence” to support this position from Scripture, Jewish tradition and Church History, which we know is often erroneous, but they were there much sooner after event than we are. Some of these traditional sites can be very moving and challenging when you get there and see the actual places.

Migdal edar

- Mentioned in Genesis 35:2

Gen 35:19 And Rachel died and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.

Gen 35:20 And Jacob set up a pillar upon her grave. That is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day.

Gen 35:21 And Israel moved, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar.

- Specifically mentioned in

Mic 4:8 And you, O tower of the flock, the hill of the daughter of Zion, to you it shall happen. And rulers, the chief ones, shall come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.

- Not just any tower

Mic 4:8 And you, O tower of the flock,

Not a watchtower for the nation’s security but Tower of the Flock, near Jerusalem

- Not just any sheep. A passage from the Mishnah leads to the conclusion that 'the flocks, which pastured there were destined for Temple sacrifices...' (*Shekelim* 7:4)

"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.

- Jacob fed his sheep there

Gen 35:21 And Israel moved, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar.

- Jerome, in 670AD mentions a tower and notes it was a mile from Bethlehem.

"Tower of Eder, ' which is interpreted `tower of the flock, ' about 1000 paces (a mile) from Bethlehem,"

- Constantine's mother, Helena, found a pile of rocks by the road and designated it a sacred site but later chose the cave to be the traditional place of His birth. This is now commemorated by a vast and garish church
- Seventh Century Church found on the spot.

Bede claimed **Arculf** was a Frankish Bishop who made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land around 680 and made a detailed record of his travels.

He states he

found "a Church of the Shepherds," a mile from Bethlehem.

Thus marking a sacred spot.

- Migdal Eder is also mentioned by the Targums. Targum Yonatan, cited by Rabbi Munk, paraphrases Genesis 35:23 and Micah 4:8, "***He spread his tent beyond Migdal Eder, the place where King Messiah will reveal Himself at the end of days.***"

So, an interesting theory. Not that it makes any difference, but it does add another element of God's preparation for this monumental event.

Being born in "Migdal Eder", (the tower of the flock) at Bethlehem is the perfect place for Christ to be born. He would have been born in the very birthplace of tens of thousands of lambs, which had been sacrificed to prefigure Him.

But Scripture says "the inn was full". Maybe they had to go back there.

LAMB OF GOD

We all know that this tiny baby was to be known as The Lamb of God who was to die in place of us for our sins.

John the Baptist in John 1: 29 proclaimed of Jesus,

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

Act 8:32 And the content of the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so He opened not His mouth.

1Pe 1:19 but with *the* precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot;

1Co 5:7 Therefore purge out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened. For also Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.

And, of course, Revelation is full of these references

Rev 5:6 And I looked, and lo, in *the* midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, amidst the elders, a Lamb stood, as if it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

Rev 7:17 For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will feed them and will lead them to *the* fountains of living waters. And God will wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Rev 14:10 he also will drink of the wine of the anger of God, having been mixed undiluted in the cup of His wrath. And he will be tormented by fire and brimstone before the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb.

Rev 15:3 And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous *are* Your works, Lord God Almighty, just and true *are* Your ways, O King of saints.

Rev 19:9 And he said to me, Write, Blessed *are* those who have been called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said to me, These are the true sayings of God.

[Rev 21:23](#) And the city had no need of the sun, nor of the moon, that they might shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and its lamp *is* the Lamb.

[Rev 22:1](#) And he showed me a pure river of Water of Life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

[Rev 22:3](#) And every curse will no longer be; but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His servants will serve Him.

It was not by chance, but by choice, that Christ died at the time of the observance of the Passover. It was not by chance that He was born in the area where these special sheep were born and from where they left for their journey to Jerusalem to be sacrificed as the Passover atonement.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT.

Suddenly, out of a clear blue sky,

[Luke 2:9](#) An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid,

Dhurr. Wouldn't you be? Can you imagine it?

THE GLORY OF THE LORD

The glory of the Lord. What exactly does that mean?

It is described in Scripture in terms of a burning bush

[Exo 3:2](#) And the Angel of Jehovah appeared to him in a flame of fire, out of the midst of a thorn bush. And he looked. And behold! The thorn bush burned with fire! And the thorn bush *was* not burned up.

a smoking, fiery, shaking mountain with massive noise like a trumpet,

[Exo 19:18](#) And Mount Sinai was smoking, all of it, because Jehovah came down upon it in fire. And the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly.

Exo 19:19 And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and became very strong, Moses spoke, and God answered him by a voice.

the beauty of a flower

Mat 6:28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They do not toil, nor do they spin,

Mat 6:29 but I say to you that even Solomon in his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Luk 12:27 Consider the lilies, how they grow; they do not toil, they do not spin. And yet I say to you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

massive light, as at Paul's conversion,

Act 22:11 And I did not see, because of the glory of that light; being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.

and the transfiguration as in Matthew 17:2

Mat 17:1 And after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and brought them up into a high mountain apart.

Mat 17:2 And He was transfigured before them. And His face shone as the sun, and His clothing was white as the light.

Have you seen the Southern Aurora or the Northern Lights? I saw the aurora as a child. It was overwhelming... and yet at the same time it was amazingly comforting with an overtone of "Well, what else would you expect from God?"

Who knows what the Glory of the Lord looked like but it terrified them as I imagine it would have been much more "in ya face" than any Aurora we might see.

At this stage it was not the crowd of heavenly host, just the glory and the angel, (again, can we assume it is Gabriel), not too big a display, yet, till they get used to the idea.

REASSURANCE

But as usual, the angel reassures them and immediately allays their fears.

Luke 2:10 but the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people.

This all sounds a little familiar. Gabriel said the same thing to a simple peasant girl, just nine months ago

Luke 1:19 "I am Gabriel," the angel answered. "I stand in the presence of God, who sent me to speak to you and tell you this good news.

Good news. The Gospel. The Message. Good News!!! What an understatement.

Luke 2:11 This very day in the City of David our Saviour was born---Christ the Lord!

Notice how the angel immediately establishes Jesus's authenticity in stipulating The City of David to emphasise the link with Prophecy. This could only be Bethlehem.

One would imagine that most people would expect the Messiah to be born in a palace, or at the very least Jerusalem. But no, it is in Bethlehem.

But would these simple men have known. They were only simple people who could not read or write. They did live in what would have been the Bible belt of the times and there was much talk of revolution, and the Messiah who was supposed to come. But Bethlehem

But if they were Temple shepherds? Maybe they did. I dunno.

When God sends people on a mission He usually makes it pretty clear where He wants them to go, if you are listening to what He says and not what you want Him to say or think He should say or what tradition tells you He is saying or should say.

To my mind, this verse puts paid to the Tower theory as, if the birth place was to be there, the Angel might have said "In the Tower"

So the angel gave them a sign to help them believe.

Luke 2:12 And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

The sign was not the amazing array of angels in the sky. That came later. The sign was a little helpless baby lying in a manger. Simple. No grandeur. No pomp. The sign was no the wonderful manifestation of God's power, but a baby.

A sign is not something but someone... only one. Jesus Christ.

HEAVENLY ADORATION.

Then came the most amazing thing.

Luke 2:13 Suddenly a great army of heaven's angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God:

Luke 2:14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!"

What did they sing? Were their voices like ours or something different, like electronic music would sound to David? How long did they sing? Were they in white as tradition tells or multi-coloured like the Opera House at New Year? Was it one song or more? Did they stay still or move about the sky. If they stayed still, in what direction? How far up were they? Did anyone else in Bethlehem see it? Did they hear it with their ears or inside their head like the Holy Spirit speaks to us?

It would be sooooo amazing. Wouldn't you have killed to see that? But we will one day. We will actually be part of it.

PEACE ON EARTH.

Another interesting thing here is that tradition says that the angels said Peace on earth to all men". This has resulted in a poor translation in the original King James but the more modern translations have corrected this error to

Luke 2:14

(ASV) Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men in whom he is well pleased.

(GNB) "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!"

(ISV) "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to people who enjoy his favor!"

(KJV) Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

(KJV+) Glory^{G1391} to God^{G2316} in^{G1722} the highest,^{G5310} and^{G2532} on^{G1909} earth^{G1093} peace,^{G1515} good will^{G2107} toward^{G1722} men.^{G444}

(LITV) Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will among men.

(MKJV) Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

(YLT) `Glory in the highest to God, and upon earth peace, among men--good will.'

Young's Literal says "Glory in the highest to God, and upon earth peace, among men--good will." So it is easy to see how there is confusion here.

The KJV actual says "Good will towards men" which the world has come to accept as that God will dish out good stuff unconditionally, regardless of their actions. This is not how God works, as our faith and actions contribute to our peace. People, who are not of good will or those who flaunt His Law and sin big time, cannot have peace so the concept of peace to men has to be linked to the mindset of the individual. As always, God deals with the individual.

It can also be taken to mean that God hopes for men to have good will towards others. That would be nice but not very realistic.

In [Job 5:6](#) we are told that

For affliction does not come forth from the dust, nor does trouble spring up out of the ground;
Job 5:7 but man is born to trouble,

Job 14:1 Man born of woman *is* of few days, and full of trouble.

Job 14:2 He comes forth like a flower, and withers; he also flees as a shadow, and does not stand.

Trouble is part of life and the only way we can have peace is through our trust in the Lord.

OFF TO BETHLEHEM

Luke 2:15 When the angels went away from them back into heaven,

I wonder how that looked. Did they fade away or just vanish or go up like Jesus did? How do they move between the realms like that? One of them had had to fight for 21 days, and even get backup, to get through to Daniel, yet here the whole of the heavenly host appeared as if a curtain had been drawn back. Wouldn't you love to see it? Wouldn't you love to go up to the Seventh Heaven like Paul did?

I wonder how long the shepherds sat there trying to process what they had seen?

Then

the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us."

They had to exercise faith by getting off their backsides and going up/down the hill to see the sign.

Luke 2:16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and saw the baby lying in the manger.

Did they all go? Did they all take that step of faith and actually do something? Did some sit and say “Whatever”, “It doesn’t apply to me” “I’m cool. I tithe.” “I can’t be bothered” “I have seen God’s power so I know I am in”

Only those who got off their backsides and made the walk actually got to meet Jesus. And guess what. It exactly as GOD said it would be. Not like the Rabbis said it would be. Not like the head shepherd said it would be. Not like the weirdo living in a hut in the woods said it will be.

THE SIGN

Just as GOD said. In a manger. Hello. That really is not the place for any baby, let alone this one, but that was the sign. A simple sign for simple folk. Not the glory but the baby.

I am not sure of the significance of including the information that the child would be in swaddling cloths or rags. God never wastes words. Some say they were actually the strips of rags used to bury the dead and indeed, the derivation of the word used for swaddling implies tearing, as in making strips of rags. They link this to his prophesied death. I dunno.

[Luke 2:17](#) When the shepherds saw him, they told them what the angel had said about the child.

I bet they did!!

Can you imagine the excitement as these rough men arrived at the scene? Did they all rush in and start gushing their story out? Did they stand tentatively at the door and wait to be invited? Who was around Miriam and the baby? If the stable had other people staying, as some say it would have had, there could have been quite a crowd of people, so the arrival of the shepherds and their amazing story would not have gone unnoticed.

[Luke 2:18](#) All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said.

GOOD NEWS

Word would have spread around Bethlehem and gradually further and further out. Those who knew the story of John the Baptist would immediately see a connection. Gossips remember. So do people whose hearts are stirred by God for His purposes would remember. This was a community based on the Temple and the story of Zechariah would have been common knowledge. These people knew the Scriptures and may have made the link, although they were looking for someone to save them from the Romans and not their sins.

The Priests would have known before breakfast.

The word would have spread like wildfire, not only in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Judea but the whole world as Jesus told his disciples to do in

[Act 1:8](#) But you shall receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you. And you shall be witnesses to Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to *the* end of the earth.

There would have been a body of memory in that community when He came back thirty years later.

And

[Luke 2:19](#) Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them.

I bet she did. What a reassurance the message of those simple shepherds must have been for her over the difficult years of her life.

[Luke 2:20](#) The shepherds went back, singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen; it had been just as the angel had told them.

It seems that to the shepherds, the most impressive thing was that the event had happened “just as the angels had said it was” Ummm. You can actually believe what God tells you directly. Maybe this meant that they went to the stable out of curiosity rather than faith? Who cares? They got off their tussocks and went. We call that stepping out in faith. It means taking a chance that God may be right or where you think is His leading actually is true. It is taking a risk on God. Usually

the worst that can happen is that we will look silly. But, if we don't take the risk, then we can miss out on a major opportunity in our lives to grow or help another to grow. I wonder how the shepherds who stayed safely in the fold felt when their mates returned. Did some rush to the stable then? Was the baby was still there? Did some never go?

WHEN.

Despite the fact that tradition says this took place in December, December is winter and they would not have been in the hills as it would have been too cold for them all. It even snows there at times. Had it been December, there would not have been enough room for Mary and Joseph in the stable. It would have been full of animals.

Using the timing provided by Zechariah's time in the Holy of Holies being linked with Atonement, and Elizabeth's pregnancy and then Mary's, the probable link with the Autumn Festivals to capitalize on the predetermined movement of people for the census, plus many other minor indications too numerous to go into here, it seems fairly obvious that the birth took place in the Autumn. This makes total sense as the Spring Festivals commemorates His death, Pentecost His interaction with man and so the Autumn ones commemorate His birth and His return to deliver His people and the world. There is some debate as to whether this took place on Trumpets or Tabernacles but that is too deep for today.

The important point is that it could not have been 25th of December and we know that this is a day of Pagan celebration that originated in Rome.

"December 25 is referred to in documents as Christmas Day as early as A.D. 324. Under the Roman emperor Justinian it was recognized as an official holiday and was linked to a Roman festival 'Dies Natali Invictus,' or 'the birthday of the unconquered'", or some say the sun. In Rome, this was the last day of the Saturnalia, a week of unbridled carnival with the culmination on the 25th with Feasting.

One can see a tenuous link with the concept of the "unconquered" and rebirth but that is all.

We, and many other people, have been aware of this link and have avoided Christmas celebrations for this reason, and I agree. But we need to not throw the baby out with the bathwater and deny ourselves the joy and wonder of this event.

CIRCUMCISION

So back to our special family.

Luke 2:21 A week later, when the time came for the baby to be circumcised,

The rite of **circumcision** (*brit milah*) is performed on the eighth day of a boy's life. (There is no parallel practice for girls, and "female circumcision" has nothing to do with Judaism.) The ritual usually takes place in the morning at the family's home.

Circumcision is commanded in Genesis 17:10-14 as an outward sign of a man's participation in Israel's covenant with God. The commandment is incumbent upon both father and child - fathers must see that their sons are circumcised, and uncircumcised grown men are obligated to perform the rite.

Gen 17:10 This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your seed after you. Every male child among you shall be circumcised.

Gen 17:11 And you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin. And it shall be a token of the covenant between Me and you.

Gen 17:12 And a son of eight days shall be circumcised among you, every male child in your generations; he that is born in the house, or bought with silver of any stranger who *is* not of your seed.

Gen 17:13 He that is born in your house, and he that is bought with your silver, must be circumcised. And My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

Gen 17:14 And the uncircumcised male child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.

[Gen 21:4](#) And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him.

It is codified in the Law

[Lev 12:3](#) And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised

We know that this was followed to the letter by Miriam and Joseph at the time and still is by the Jewish community.

Circumcision is so important that it may be performed on the Sabbath or a holiday, despite prohibitions of drawing blood on those days.

Today, our society considers it a barbaric practice and it is actively discouraged by the medical profession. Indeed, there is talk that those parents who have this procedure carried out on their son, will be charged with assault or child abuse.

However, the evidence to support the medical validity and benefits of this simple procedure is telling

- Fewer UTI's, especially in the childhood years – 3-10 times reduction
- Reduced penile cancer and cervical cancer
- Reduced risk of HIV – up to 40% reduction in 2 years
- Reduced risk of STD's to man and partner
- Reduced foreskin problems
- Hygiene – When my father was in the desert in WW2, he witnessed the two types of men. He saw some terrible things that happened to men who had not been circumcised and when he came home insisted that his sons “be done” contrary to the family tradition.
- Supposedly better for partners – difficult to prove.
- Sense of connectedness with cultural group.

PROBLEMS:

- Pain at the time of surgery – transient for a baby and not remembered

- Bleeding but if done of the eighth day, there is elevated prothrombin in boys, only, on that day only.
- Infection but refer to Dad in the desert.
- Skin adhesions
- Scarring
- Curvature of the penis
- Psychological issues

To the Jew, however, the medical debate is not an issue. The practice is carried out as part of their religious obligation and delight in the Lord.

In modern Jewish practice this is done in the home by specially trained men. Perhaps this is done so the mother can take some part in the service due to her unclean period. In the time of Jesus' birth, it was common practice for the father to do the deed and so it is a fair assumption that Joseph carried out the ritual.

Also it is at this time that the child is named and this was the father's role to do this. Joseph obeys and gives the child the name that the child's father in heaven has chosen.

[Luk 2:21](#) His name was called JESUS, *the name called by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.*

CONCLUSION

So, the long promised Son of God and Man of Sorrows had been born in a simple place, engineered by simple folk, surrounded by ordinary people, witnessed by rough workmen and proclaimed throughout the known world by simple folk going about their business.

But God also showed His glory and His power in the way it all came together; how His planning and preparation had paid off, how people, both simple and sophisticated can trust Him.

Each of these people had to step out in faith to make all this happen. If one of the links in this had reneged, the wheels would have fallen off. Maybe He had a

backup plan. I dunno but He trusted simple folk with the most important event in the history of the world.

Next time we will look at how God uses the sophisticated, the educated, the powerful and how each of them had the same choices as the simple folk.