

12242024 It was in THE AREA of Bethlehem that Jesus was born. The picture of the stable and the manger as the birthplace of Jesus is a picture indelibly etched in our minds; but it may well be that that picture is not altogether correct.

Bethlehem was quite a little town six miles to the south of Jerusalem.. The name Bethlehem means The House of Bread, and Bethlehem stood in a fertile countryside, which made its name fitting. It stood high up on a grey limestone ridge over two 25 hundred feet high. The ridge had a summit at each end, and a hollow like a saddle between them. So, from its position, Bethlehem looked like a town set in an amphitheater of hills.

Bethlehem had a long biblical history. It was there that the patriarch Jacob had buried Rachel, setting up a pillar of memory beside her grave (Gen chapter 35 and 48). It was there that Ruth had lived when she married Boaz (Ruth 1). But in the history of Israel, and to the minds of the people, Bethlehem was uniquely the city of David. For Bethlehem was the home and the city of David (1Sam chapters 16,17,20) and it was for the water of the well of Bethlehem that David longed when he was a hunted fugitive upon the hills (2Sam 23)

And most importantly It was from the line of David that God was to send the great deliverer of his people the Messiah. As the prophet Micah prophesied:

ESV Micah 5:2 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

- **Lets pick up the story Every 15 years or so the Romans took a census of the people to determine the tax rolls.. Caesar Augustus had declared that each person should travel to their home town of birth to register in a census. Bethlehem was Joseph's family village. This was proclaimed to insure that all citizens were correctly paying their taxes.**

ESV LK 2: 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

- ***Why inn and not a relatives home? They were a disgrace? Most likely headed back toward Jerusalem...and Mary starts to going into labor... and realized they could not make their destination.***

Apparently The Tower of the Flock was the only structure available on the long road through the fields of sheep between the two cities. more on this location in a couple minutes

- **Picture this ...They have just settled in ...Joseph spreading blankets on the straw...Mary trying to find a comfortable position ...And oh great her water breaks....she goes into labor...for how long only she and Joseph know... *in a Completely Unsterile environment...Joseph is the mid-husband... The baby is put in Swaddling cloths in the manger to protect the newborn sacrificial lambs and also used for babies to help transition them to like outside the***

womb... and Mary recovering having just gone through labor and delivery...

The thrill of a baby and the disappointment in their circumstances meanwhile out in the nearby fields...

Luke^{2 8} *That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep.*

- The God of all creation first announces his birth to a group of men, who live on the outskirts of society. They live in the margins, working stiffly doing a necessary but far less than a prestigious job... **While the people of Jerusalem slept.**
- Near Eastern shepherding is one of the most demanding and least appreciated and rewarded tasks in that first-century culture.
- They lived most of the year outside, away from the townspeople.
- Flocks were kept outdoors from April to November, and, sometimes during the winter in suitable locations. **Sheep are defenseless and therefore easily frightened...and not particularly bright animals.** And will always impulsively react before they think.
- Sheep are also vulnerable to a wide variety of diseases, ticks, insects and parasitic afflictions. Consequently, sheep require constant attention and care. Shepherding is a “hands on” calling. **You can't shepherd from a distance.**
- Nightly protected encampments were necessary so that the sheep would lie down to sleep, feeling safe and secure – and dealing with the prone to wander difficult sheep...
- **"Keeping watch" so to do guard duty.** protecting the sheep from lions, bears, wolves, and thieves scaring off these

predators with a sling or when necessary, fighting them with the rod.

*******This is where it gets different....these were not your ordinary shepherds....**

These shepherds were extraordinary shepherds. They were called “Levitical Shepherds”. They had been chosen and trained to attend the flock of sheep that were to be used as sacrificial lambs in the Temple. Sacrificial lambs had to be “spotless and without blemish.”

They required special treatment and observing. According to the laws of the time, the sheep that were used for the offerings had to be a one-year-old male sheep that had been outside for 365 days (one year). When they were ready, they were taken to Jerusalem to be sacrificed on the Sabbath in the Temple.

The fields around Bethlehem were valuable grazing lands.

- **The Priestly Shepherds still watched over the Temple flock both day and night. When the ewes were ready to deliver their sacrificial lambs, the shepherds took them to a special place.**
- **The place for these special Temple sheep was the Tower of the Flock,’ located close to the road between Bethlehem and Jerusalem.**
- **In Hebrew, the name of the tower is “Migdal Eder.” **Show pictures tower and manger****

How do we know? This was prophesied also by Micah...

ESV Micah 4: ⁸ And you, O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, the former dominion shall come, kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem. ESV

Show pictures tower and manger

- **The tower of the Flock was constructed as a place for watching over the sheep from the tower...**
- **On the ground floor, a room is designated for the delivery and protection of these special lambs.**
- **The tower of the flock was kept as sterile and clean as possible for the arrival of newborn sacrificial lambs. The ewes delivered in a clean environment (as specified by Rabbinic regulations for these special temple animals) and their lambs were sorted and immediately inspected for ‘spot or blemish.**
- **Then cleaned and wrapped in swaddling cloths which were delivered by the priest from Jerusalem, to protect them and keep them from bruising themselves and danger.**
- **Swaddling clothes described in the Bible consisted of a cloth tied together by bandage-like strips.**

So was in this special ‘tower, that Jesus our sacrificial lamb was born what seemed like a tragedy for Mary and Joseph who could not find any other lodging was God’s divine plan as prophesied by Micah nearly 700 years previously.

So Picture this One minute the shepherds are talking quietly in the blackness of the Spring sky. The next moment the hillside is ablaze in light with an angel standing in front of them...

Luke 2: 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.

The Glory or Radiance of the Lord was physical as in burning bright light and emotional... the overwhelming feeling of the

presence of God... When the shepherds saw this intense bright light and felt the presence of the divine... and someone standing there who was not there a second ago... they were terrified...

¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

- The angel utters the words that Jews had longed for centuries to hear -- " Christ the Lord is born...**and for all people///plural!!."**
- **And This good news was for them! for the angel said you! and he is close within a few miles! **And we can locate him...**he is not far away..**

Luke 2: 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

- **This sign is especially for you... as you will know where to look...**
- **A manager wrapped in swaddling cloths... a cloth wrapped around the baby tied together with strips of cloth ... like a first born male sheep designated for the sacrifice for the peoples sins...**
- **The Messiah, the sacrificial Lamb of God would be born in the same place all unspotted lambs designated for Temple sacrifice were born**

But wait there's more...Then we go from one angel ...to a great company...thousands...

ESV *Luke 2: 13* And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

- **His favor.. good news for all people is a savior...whom God is pleased to give...bringing peace between God and humanity...is what pleased God...not sure how long the angels sang and praised...but when they were done...lets go...**

LK 2: 15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”

- **When the declaration was made to these Levitical Shepherds that watched over their sheep in in this special field full of sacrificial lambs, they apparently knew exactly where to go to discover that Baby.**
- **So they headed on the road toward Bethlehem... checking the towers of the flock along the way...till they found him**

LK 2: 16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

- **Put yourselves in the sandals of the shepherds, looking into the tower of the flock , and seeing in the candle light ...the new born King , in swaddling cloths lying in a manger...the Awe they must have felt ...and they worshipped him...**
- **There is no more fitting song in our time...then to reenact that moment...holding candles and singing in that Silent night and most Holy night...**

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