

# The Birth of Christ



## Virgin Conception

Often during the Christmas season, Scriptures are looked at which apply to the birth of Jesus Christ. First let us turn to Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." We see that this prophecy is fulfilled in the Gospels.

In Matthew 1:18, we read, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost." Here is an Orientalism which people of the Western world do not understand. Westerners say that Mary and Joseph were engaged, but before they could be married, she was found with child. This is not so. The wedding customs of the East are such that the priest consults the stars and fixes a date for the couple to come together, sometime after the wedding ceremony has been performed. Easterners think it is important to have one's children born "under a certain star", and in this way they try to fix the future characteristics of children by causing them to be born at a certain time.

In this verse, we see the word "espoused", which means married, and we further see that in verse 20 of the same chapter, the phrase appears, "...fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife ... " These details are emphasized in the Scriptures so that we may be assured that the virgin conception is a fact and is a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

## **Swaddling Clothes**

Luke 2:7, "And she brought forth her first born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." In the East, it is not unusual for the people to sleep with their animals; in India the poor people have to sleep in the street sometimes. At least with the animals there is protection and warmth. Also, the children and parents sleep together in the East. Whenever a stable is used, the straw is piled as high as possible and a covering like a sheet is spread over the top. That is why it seems to me that Luke 2:16 is describing this custom of parents and children sleeping together: "And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger."(Remember, the commas and other punctuation were added by the translators.)

The reference to swaddling clothes in Luke 2:7 is interesting because this custom is still practiced in some parts of the East today. The sons of kings and princes are wrapped around and around in fine linen strips about two inches wide. This is done to straighten the baby out as a sign that the parents will rear the child to be straightforward before the Lord, and free from crookedness.

We know that Mary was told by the angel that her son would be called the Son of God; therefore, she rightly treated him as royalty and used swaddling cloths. I have been amused to hear Western commentators say that these swaddling clothes must have been rags, since Mary and Joseph were poor and could not afford proper baby clothes. Some of the wealthiest people of India, who send to Paris for fabulous layettes for their babies, still use swaddling cloths in order to carry out this ancient tradition.

## **Shepherds**

Luke also tells of the shepherds who watched their flocks by night. I am sure that the birth of Jesus was during warm weather because in cold weather the sheep are put into a corral. But in the summertime, a farmer will frequently ask shepherds to bring their sheep onto his land in order to fertilize the fields, and in this case, the shepherds do watch their flocks by night.

Why did the angel of the Lord announce the arrival of the Messiah to shepherds? People nowadays think that shepherds are humble and lowly people. But this is not the case. In the East, a shepherd is the most trust worthy person in the whole community. God knew that the shepherds would listen well to the words of the angel, and that they would publish it rightly when they told the people what they had seen and heard.

## **Traditional Song**

Whenever an Eastern prince is born, the musicians of the court are informed and they sing this traditional song: Unto King Micah a child is born; Unto King Micah a son is given!

We find the same type of song recorded in Isaiah 9:6; the difference is that this is the prophecy of the coming of Christ, therefore the words read: "For unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given:"

Ordinarily, the name of the father is inserted in that space. The servants of Brahmin priests go about making the official announcement about the royal heir in India, so that the whole country may rejoice and sing praises to the new arrival. But God Himself announced the birth of Jesus through the shepherds and the heavenly hosts gave praises.

### **Gifts**

Each person in the kingdom is expected to bring a little bit of gold, and other nearby kings will send gifts also. This is why the Eastern rulers are so wealthy; their sons have brought wealth to them through these customs. We see this tradition carried out at Jesus' birth with the coming of the Magi of the East and their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Tradition says that there were three wise men, possibly because three gifts are listed. The Scriptures does not actually state how many there were, in addition, it is not known of a certainty where these wise men were from, but some say they were Persians, and others think they may have been Hindus.

### **December 25<sup>th</sup>**

As I said before, I know that Jesus' birth occurred in warm weather because of the flock of sheep being out on the countryside; do you know how we came to observe December 25th? This date was taken in the time of the Emperor Constantine, who apparently professed Christianity only for political reasons. Most of his pagan subjects became nominal Christians. These subjects had been accustomed to celebrating a pagan holiday for a certain child god on December 25th, a holiday known as Childmas, After they became Christians, they missed the revelry of their pagan holiday. "We were happier as pagans," they grumbled. "All right, go ahead and celebrate it," Constantine told them in effect, "but do not call it Childmas any more; call it Christmas." Ancient tradition places the birth of Jesus in the fall around August or September.

Fortunately, God looks on the heart of man, and does not look merely at the outward observances. May God bless you.

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