

## What Saith the Scripture?

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### **The Glory and Majesty of Christmas**

Or, The Christmas Story: Its Meaning and Significance

"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace"

(Isaiah 9:6).

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12-1-2002

#### **Preface**

In the two millennia since His birth, the luster of the story of the birth of Jesus Christ has lost none of its fascination for those who have glimpsed its significance. "For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour, which is Christ the LORD" (Luke 2:11). Whatever secular history or ecclesiastical tradition has made of Christmas, *Christmas is the birth of Jesus Christ, God's Greatest Gift to Humanity*. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have Everlasting Life" (John 3:16). The centrality of the theme of God manifesting His Son in human flesh to save us from ourselves and sin will never be forgotten by those who have submitted themselves to the Love of God. "And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His Name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Why but Love would the Divine Father offer His Only Begotten Son to rebellious and sinful man? And, why but Divine Wisdom would God Only Wise see the necessity for His Beloved Son to actually become human flesh to redeem humanity and demonstrate the ability of Believing Man to live "holy, acceptable unto God" (Romans 12:1). "3 For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His Own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: 4 that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (8:3-4).

#### **The Christmas Story**

The Scriptural narrative for the Christmas story is found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, with the second chapter of Luke giving us the best known chronology of the events. "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us" (Luke 1:1).

**The Birth of John the Baptist Preceded Christ.** The Christmas story in the Gospel of Luke begins with a portrayal of the events preceding the birth of Christ, namely the birth of John the Baptist-- the "voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the LORD, as said the prophet Esaias [Isaiah]" (John 1:23)-- to Mary's elderly but godly cousin Elizabeth and her husband Zacharias, a priest. "16 And many of the children of Israel shall he [John] turn to the LORD their God. 17 And he shall go before Him [Jesus]

in the spirit and power of Elias [Elijah], to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the LORD" (Luke 1:16-17). Mary, who dwelt in the Galilean city of Nazareth in northern Israel, more than 80 miles to the north of Elizabeth, conceived Jesus by the Holy Ghost during the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. "35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the Power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. 36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren" (1:35-36). Traveling to Jutta, i.e., a "city of Judah" (1:39), a city of the priests in the mountains of Judah south of Hebron, Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth for "about three months" (1:56) before returning to Nazareth. Her visit yielded her the additional assurance and testimony from Elizabeth that "there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the LORD" (1:45). Mary's resulting Magnificat (1:46-55) demonstrated her humility, gratitude, and understanding of her situation, i.e., "46 And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the LORD, 47 and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. 48 For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. 49 For He that is Mighty hath done to me great things; and Holy is His Name" (1:46-49). What a time of fellowship, rejoicing, and strengthening, these godly women must have had while preparing for the birth of their children! "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb... He hath holpen His servant Israel, in remembrance of His Mercy" (1:42, 54).

**Mary Returned to Nazareth to Prepare for Christ's Birth.** Leaving Jutta at the end of her first trimester, Mary just missed the birth of John. After returning to Nazareth, most probably Mary informed Joseph that she was pregnant, rather than awaiting Joseph to discover it for himself, i.e., "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil" (Proverbs 31:11). "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" (Matthew 1:18). If the Bible is not accurate about the historicity of Jesus, what else can be believed of Its declarations? "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in Truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1Thessalonians 2:13). Mary, the mother of Jesus, was the human contribution to the humanity of Jesus Christ, since God was the Father of Jesus in the miraculous conception and birth of Christ. [Read "[The Amazing Humanity of Jesus Christ](http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Jehovah/Amazing.Humanity.of.Jesus.html)" -- <http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Jehovah/Amazing.Humanity.of.Jesus.html> --.] "Therefore the LORD Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His Name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). It is believed that Mary, not just Joseph, was of the lineage of David, since Scripture tells us that Jesus the "Son of the Highest" (1:32) would receive the "throne of His father David" (1:32) and that Jesus' human parentage through Mary would be of the "seed of David according to the flesh" (Romans 1:3).

**The Angel Appeared in a Dream to Joseph.** Purity of life was important to the carpenter Joseph, even as it was to Joseph in Ancient Egypt, when he fled from the

advances of Potiphar's wife, i.e., "And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out" (Genesis 39:12). "19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. 20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. 21 And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His Name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:19-21). Scripture does not indict Joseph for wondering about Mary's explanation of her awkward appearing pregnancy, but his knowledge of her godly character made him to think mercifully about her circumstances, before the angel of the LORD in a dream certified her story. "Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which Thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old" (Micah 7:20). God trusted the integrity of Joseph to keep from knowing Mary sexually until after the birth of Jesus.; thus, preserving the sanctity of the Virgin Birth of Christ and the inescapable conclusion of the Divinity of Christ, i.e., "6 Who [Christ Jesus], being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the Death of the Cross" (Philippians 2:6-8). "22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the LORD by the prophet, saying, 23 Behold, a virgin shall be with Child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His Name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God With Us. 24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the LORD had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: 25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her Firstborn Son: and he called His Name JESUS" (Matthew 1:22-25). [Read "[The Virgin Birth](http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Stories/The.Virgin.Birth.html)" by Dr. Ian Paisley -- <http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Stories/The.Virgin.Birth.html> --.]

**Christ Was Born in 4 BC.** The timing of the nativity of Jesus Christ is thought by many Biblical scholars to have been about four years earlier than the present calendar beginning of the Christian era. "1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. 2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)" (Luke 2:1-2). Sir Robert Anderson in "[The Coming Prince](http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Voice/The.Coming.Prince.html)" -- <http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Voice/The.Coming.Prince.html> -- (1895)-- where incidentally, his title referred to the Antichrist, the "prince that shall come [that] shall destroy the city and the sanctuary" (Daniel 9:26)-- demonstrated that though an enrollment and taxation took place under the governorship of Cyrenius (Publius Sulpicius Quirinus) nine or ten years later than the traditional nativity, history now establishes the fact that Cyrenius had also served an *earlier* term as governor, beginning in the latter part of 4 BC. "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Coupled with the fact of Cyrenius' 4 BC governorship of Syria, we also learn that Herod the Great's involvement with the Messiah had to take place before the time of his own death in 4 BC. Herod the Great was the cruel king that received the Wise Men that came to worship the Newborn "King of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2). His calculated and sinister reaction was to quickly attempt to slaughter his New Rival, i.e., "Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the Wise Men, was exceeding wrath, 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" (2:16). "It will, therefore, be here assumed as absolutely certain that the birth of Christ took place at some date not earlier than the autumn of B.C. 4" (excerpted from [Chapter 8 "Messiah the Prince"](http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Voice/The.Coming.Prince.4.html#CHAPTER%208) -- [http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Voice/The.Coming.Prince.4.html#CHAPTER 8](http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Voice/The.Coming.Prince.4.html#CHAPTER%208) -- from Sir Robert Anderson's "The Coming Prince," where an extensive chronological discussion of the dating of the First Advent of Christ is given.).

**Rome Required Mary and Joseph to Travel to Bethlehem.** Joseph the carpenter was not only a just and good man, but he was "subject unto the higher powers" (Romans 13:1) in paying his taxes, even as Jesus, Joseph's apprentice carpenter, would later teach His disciples to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" (Mark 12:17). "3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) 5 to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with Child" (Luke 2:3-5). Both Mary and Joseph were of the Davidic line and were unfailingly required by Rome to journey the more than 70 miles to Bethlehem to be enrolled and taxed, though Rome did not know that its decree for taxation would fulfill ancient prophecy by causing a Nazareth Child to be born in Bethlehem. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, 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 very fact that Mary was betrothed to Joseph meant that she was regarded as the wife of Joseph even before the wedding, but upright Jews would never consummate their marriage until after the wedding ceremony, and further, Joseph would willingly wait until after the birth of Jesus. "And they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her" (Genesis 29:20). Mary's Miraculous Pregnancy was no doubt a Cloud and Reproach initially shared by both Joseph and Mary, but they were comforted in knowing that Mary's Child "shall be Great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the LORD God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:32). "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be" (Genesis 49:10).

**O Little Town of Bethlehem.** Bethlehem Ephratah of the land of Judah is only about six miles south of Jerusalem. The Almighty designed no vacancy in the inn to keep man's honor from interfering with the humbleness of the birth of the KING of Kings. "For ye know the Grace of our LORD Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich" (2Corinthians 8:9). Christ's humility was foretold by prophecy, i.e., "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is Just, and having Salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zechariah 9:9). The stable that accommodated the weary couple is believed to be a grotto-- one of many caves in the area used as stables-- adjacent to the inn, where Mary and Joseph found their place amid the sights and smells of its barnyard inhabitants; while the palace fortress of Herod the Great was only a few miles distant, on the plateau of a hill called Jebel Fureidis or "Little Paradise Mountain." Though Mary miraculously gave birth while still a virgin, Jesus was only her "firstborn"-- implying that later her virginity ended with the birth of other sons and daughters, i.e., "Is not this the Carpenter, the Son of Mary, the Brother of

James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not His sisters here with us?" (Mark 6:3). Christ's birth in a stable, sleeping in the feeding trough of lowly animals, predicted the humility of Earth's Greatest Man, i.e., "Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20). A swaddling band, in which the infant Jesus was wrapped, is described in the Davis Dictionary of the Bible (1898): "The babe was laid diagonally on a square piece of cloth and two corners were turned over its body, one over its feet, and one under its head. The whole was then fastened by bands wound around the outside." "6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her Firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:6-7).

**While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks.** A mile outside the sleepy town of Bethlehem is a little plain, understood to be that described by Luke. And, contrary to the expectations of the world, God did not manifest Himself in the robes and armour of the rich and powerful to command the attention of the unwilling, but He manifested Himself to the lowly (for there are so many of us), i.e., the "poor have the Gospel preached to them" (Matthew 11:5). "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night" (Luke 2:8). Angels are God's messengers, who are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of Salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). Their name *aggelos* in the Greek means messenger. The angel spoke a message of comfort and "good tidings of great joy" (Luke 2:10) to the shepherds that night amidst the Glory of the LORD that magnificently "shone round about them" (2:9), emphasizing the point that "unto [them was] born [that] day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the LORD" (2:11). And, this reminds us that the "Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (19:10). Try as man will to get ahead in life, Jesus came not to make humanity happy with the hope that they may have more than the next person, but to give to all Salvation, Restoration, and Fulfillment of each his own potential through the "riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). In other words, Jesus was born to die that "we might live through Him" (1John 4:9). And, not to restrict the scope of the good tidings given to the shepherds, Jesus was born to give us the Divine Example of how we *ought* and *can* live, i.e., "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an Example, that ye should follow His steps" (1Peter 2:21). "9 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. 10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good Tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the LORD" (Luke 2:9-11).

**Away in a Manger.** God does condescend to give man signs, when man needs them and it suits His purpose in this world. "Therefore the LORD Himself shall give you a Sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His Name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). To insure that the shepherds found the right baby, the one in swaddling clothes was Him. No, not just in swaddling clothes, but the only one lying in a manger!

"And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger" (Luke 2:12). Quite possibly, the angel speaking thus far was again the angel Gabriel, who only nine months earlier had announced good tidings to the Young Virgin that she would be the mother of the long awaited Messiah, and that the Child Himself would be Divine since the Father Himself would be God! "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (1:35). Punctuating the angel's testimony to the shepherds, a heavenly chorus of angels sang. Since the angels sang at the Creation, i.e., the "morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7), how else would we mortals describe the wonderful articulation of such a multitude of the heavenly host but the song of glorious praise? "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, good will toward men" (Luke 2:13-14). Who but God would have the boldness to announce to cynical man that the birth of this Child would usher in a new era of peace on Earth? But, more importantly, it would be a *voluntary* peace chosen by those only who submit themselves continually to the rule of the Messiah. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid... Abide in Me, and I in you... and your joy no man taketh from you" (John 14:27; 15:4; 16:22).

**O Come, All Ye Faithful.** The shepherds were promised to find the Newborn Babe and the Messiah that very night in the very same Bethlehem manger. "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19). "15 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. 16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger" (Luke 2:15-16). Typical of these New Testament stories, the beneficiaries of the sign, healing, etc. tended to "blaze abroad the matter" (Mark 1:45), but in this instance, it was Divinely expected of them. Anna the prophetess, more than an hundred and three years old, responded to seeing the newly dedicated Infant Jesus by speaking "of Him to all them that looked for Redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38). God always has His Remnant in every age to testify of His faithfulness. "16 Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a Book of Remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His Name. 17 And they shall be Mine, saith the LORD of Hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" (Malachi 3:16-17). "17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child. 18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds" (Luke 2:17-18). Again, the Divine Narrative gives us the understanding that Mary compared the testimony of the shepherds with the things told her by the angel Gabriel, by her husband Joseph, and by her cousin Elizabeth, and she marveled at the "wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:38). "But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them

in her heart" (Luke 2:19). Likewise, those humble shepherds were overjoyed that the Almighty had chosen them to see with their own eyes the "Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42). "And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them" (Luke 2:20).

**Christ Was Dedicated at the Temple Forty Days Later.** The Gospel of Luke proceeds from the shepherds visit at the manger scene to the required visit of Mary to make the sin offering to make ceremonial atonement for the uncleanness of the new mother forty days after the birth of Jesus. "6 And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest... 8 And if she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean" (Leviticus 12:6, 8). According to the pecuniary poverty of Mary and Joseph, they opted for the lesser expensive turtledoves or pigeons; but also, they were required by the Law of Moses to dedicate their Firstborn Son with an offering of "five shekels" (Numbers 18:16), for Christ was "made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4:4-5). And, upon this very day was fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi, at least in part, "Behold, I will send My messenger [John the Baptist], and he shall prepare the way before Me [Christ]: and **the LORD, Whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His Temple**, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, He shall come, saith the LORD of Hosts" (Malachi 3:1).

At this time, the aged Simeon, who waited for the Messiah, the "Consolation [Greek, *paraklesis* ] of Israel" (Luke 2:25) because the "Holy Ghost was upon him" (2:25), was directed by that same Spirit to the Temple, where the LORD fulfilled His Promise to him that "he should not see death, before he had seen the LORD's Christ" (2:26). *The Saints who watch for Christ this second time shall be so rewarded as Simeon and Anna, who watched for Him the first time.* "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto Salvation" (Hebrews 9:28). After taking Jesus up into his arms, Simeon said, "LORD, now lettest 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" (Luke 2:29-32). After blessing the parents, Simeon prophesied to Mary, "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" (2:34-35). Isaiah's prophecy of the Suffering Saviour was no doubt chiefly in Simeon's mind. "3 He is despised and rejected of men; a Man Of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. 4 Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His

stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:3-6). Anna the centenarian, Spirit filled prophetess came "in that instant [and] gave thanks likewise unto the LORD, and spake of Him to all them that looked for Redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38).

**The Wise Men Visited the Messiah in Bethlehem Probably Within Two Months of His Birth.** Some Bible scholars and commentators believe that the visit from the Wise Men or Magi occurred two years after the birth of Christ, because the Gospel of Matthew declares that Herod "slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under" (Matthew 2:16). However, since Herod the Great died in 4 BC-- the same year of Christ's birth-- it was more likely that Joseph and Mary returned from the Jerusalem dedication to their ancestral city of Bethlehem-- this time to a "house" (Matthew 2:11) and not a stable-- for a short period, e.g., an additional month, during which time they encountered the Magi, then subsequently made their flight into Egypt. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called My son out of Egypt" (Hosea 11:1). But, returning to the chronology of the Wise Men, "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" (Matthew 2:1). This was the infamous Herod the Great, whose remodeled and enlarged Temple was visited by our LORD at the first Passover of His ministry in 29 AD, forty-six years after Herod began the reconstruction project in 18 BC. [Note: 18 (BC) + 29 (AD) = 47 years. But, in reckoning years from BC to AD, one year must be omitted, since from 1 BC to 1 AD, there are not two years, but one year. Therefore, 47 years less one is 46 years.] "19 Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy This Temple, and in three days I will raise it up. 20 Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this Temple in building, and wilt Thou rear it up in three days? 21 But He spake of the Temple of His body. 22 When therefore He was risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this unto them; and they believed the Scripture, and the Word which Jesus had said" (John 2:19-22).

**Daniel Helped the Wise Men Find the Messiah.** The Hebrew word "mashiyach" is translated in the King James Version as "anointed" or "Messiah". The only times the word "Messiah" appears in the Old Testament (KJV) is in Daniel 9:25-26. "25 Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. 26 And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for Himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined" (Daniel 9:25-26). It should come as no shock that Daniel's prophecies would give time oriented evidence to direct someone to the birth of the LORD Jesus Christ. The Wise Men of the Christmas story were Magi. "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came Wise Men [Greek, *magoi* ] from the East to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him" (Matthew 2:1-2). These Magi were the

soothsayers of ancient Persia-- the land where Daniel was a legend. In fact, the Old Testament text refers to Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as numbered among the Wise Men that were ready to be slain for their inability to make known then interpret the forgotten dream of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia. "12 For this cause the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the Wise Men of Babylon. 13 And the decree went forth that the Wise Men should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain" (Daniel 2:12-13). But, of course, Daniel and his companions *did* perform that impossible task by the direct revelation of the Almighty. "Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of Heaven" (2:19).

Being familiar with the Prophecies of Daniel, such as the Prophecy concerning the Seventy Weeks (Daniel 9:24-27), the Wise Men of the Christmas story could interpret the ancient prophecies with the other Scriptures of the Jews, i.e. the Old Testament. Using a passage such as Numbers 24:17, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel," they knew to look for a star. Isaiah 9:6-7 told them that this Messiah would be God in human flesh, as well as a king on the throne of David. "6 For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His Kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with Judgment and with Justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of Hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:6-7). As understanding as they were of the prophecies, they-- like ourselves-- naively asked questions. Their naivete was apparent when the Magi appeared before Herod the Great, King of the Jews, asking directions to find the One that is "born King of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2). It is interesting to see how appropriately Herod's religious counselors directed the Wise Men, when they cited Micah 5:2. "And when he [Herod] had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he [Herod] 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" (Matthew 2:4-6). And, with the providence typical of the Almighty, He preserved the Wise Men by warning them of Herod's devious scheme to kill the Messiah-- and probably themselves as well. "And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way" (Matthew 2:12). Likewise, in a dream, Joseph was warned, "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" (Matthew 2:13). Surely, it was timely supply for the poor couple to receive their traveling expenses from the worshipful gifts presented by the Magi. "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, and myrrh" (2:11). But, is this not in keeping with the hand of Jehovah Jireh for all His Saints throughout all time? "But my God shall supply all your need according to His Riches in Glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

How could Daniel help to foretell the Messiah's birth? Clues such as the timing of the decree to rebuild the city of Jerusalem were known to the Magi. According to Sir Robert Anderson's "The Coming Prince" (1895), March 14th 445 BC (Julian calendar) was the time that Artaxerxes decreed "the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem" (Daniel 9:25). If the Magi understood that "seven weeks, and three score and two weeks" (9:25)-- 69 weeks-- would be accomplished, and "shall Messiah be cut off, but not for Himself" (9:26), and if the 69 weeks were actually weeks of years, then  $69 \text{ (weeks)} \times 7 \text{ (of years)} \times 360 \text{ (days in a prophetic year)} = 173,880 \text{ prophetic days}$ . Further, Artaxerxes' decree is described by Nehemiah. "1 And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. 2 Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, 3 and said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? 4 Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of Heaven. 5 And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. 6 And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. 7 Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; 8 and a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me" (Nehemiah 2:1-8).

According to Anderson's "The Coming Prince," the 173,880 days from Artaxerxes' decree would terminate upon April 6th 32 AD (Julian calendar)-- Nisan 10 of the Jewish calendar. If the Magi understood that the 173,880 prophetic days was the approximate time of death of "Messiah the Prince" (Daniel 9:25), then they would have to look for Him before He was "cut off"-- "but not for Himself" (9:26), i.e. His Atoning Sacrifice on the Cross. Jesus the Messiah was "cut off" (9:26), when He was crucified on a Roman cross, we believe, on April 10th 32 AD (Julian calendar)-- on a Nisan 14, Thursday, which was a Passover observance of the Jews. Without any deep understanding of chronologies, calendars, or dating, the 173,880 prophetic days divided by 365 regular days equals 476.38356164 years-- enough to span 445 BC to 32 AD. The "inclusive" time *between* March 14th 445 BC (Julian calendar) [Longimanus Artaxerxes' "commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem" (Daniel 9:25)] *and* April 6th 32 AD (Julian calendar) ["Messiah the Prince" (9:25) triumphantly entering Jerusalem to be crucified that same week] is represented by Sir Robert Anderson *as follows*:  $445 \text{ (BC)} + 32 \text{ (AD)} = 477 \text{ years} - 1 \text{ year (to compensate for there being no year zero)} = 476 \text{ years} \times 365 \text{ days} = 173,740 \text{ days} + 24 \text{ days (14th of March to 6th of April, inclusive)} + 119 \text{ days (476 years divided by 4 for leap years)} = 173,883 \text{ days} - 3 \text{ days (to account for the Julian calendar's inaccuracy of$

accounting three of the four intervening century years as leap years) = 173,880 days. This would have brought the Wise Men to the LORD Jesus before the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. But, how much earlier? That is where the star gave them more pointed directions. The Wise Men asked Herod: "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the East" (Matthew 2:2). "Bethlehem of Judaea" (2:5) was the reply. The Creator used the star to give the final directions. "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" (2:9-10). How any heavenly object could be used to explain the Star of Bethlehem is difficult without using the word *miraculous*. But then, "with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27).

## Conclusion

The birth of Jesus Christ in a Bethlehem manger is inextricably linked to His Second Advent in the very near future. Though Daniel's Seventy Weeks prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27) gave the Wise Men understanding of the timing of the First Advent of Messiah the Prince, the same prophecy that directed the Wise Men to Bethlehem has now long been understood to additionally refer to the upcoming Tribulation Week, also known as the Seventieth Week of Daniel. "The LORD is at hand" (Philippians 4:5). That the Messiah came the first time to "save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21) and not commence His reign upon Earth, speaks of the sad plight of man in his rebellious and sinful condition. "10 He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. 11 He came unto His Own, and His Own received Him not. 12 But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name" (John 1:10-12). Jesus came not to give the Professed Saints the right to continue a willfully disobedient lifestyle, but to begin a New Life of victory over the world. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a New Creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2Corinthians 5:17). When Jesus spoke to His disciples soon before His Crucifixion, He assured them that He would *never* abandon them. "16 And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; 17 even the Spirit of Truth; Whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. 18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:16-18). The Blessed Spirit came to us at Pentecost in keeping of the Saviour's Promise, which further fulfilled the Promise of the New Covenant. "And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My Statutes, and ye shall keep My Judgments, and do them" (Ezekiel 36:27). Literally receiving the purpose of the Promise will cause us to "be willing in the day of [His] Power" (Psalm 110:3).

May our love of the Babe in the Bethlehem manger cause us to submit ourselves with willing obedience to Messiah the Prince. "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, Who rideth upon the Heaven in Thy help, and in His excellency on the sky" (Deuteronomy 33:26). And, may our wonder at the Divine Love of the Christmas story cause our hearts to follow hard after Him. "9 Having made known unto us the Mystery of His Will, according to His Good Pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself: 10 that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in Heaven, and which are on Earth; even in Him: 11 in Whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the Counsel of His Own Will" (Ephesians 1:9-11).

Merry Christmas!

Maranatha!

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by Hudson Taylor

"As we look forward to the months of this year, we know not where the close will find us; whether here or in the eternal Home. We know not what burdens, perplexities, or difficulties it may bring; but we know Him, whose we are, and whom we serve. He knows all; this suffices for us."