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## The Wonder of the Manger

### The Typical Nativity Story

- 1 • Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem
- Mary rides a donkey
- There is no room in any of the inns
- Finally some innkeeper offers them a stable in which Jesus is born
- Wise men come to manger
- 2 • True.
- No mention is made in Scripture of Mary riding a donkey. She may have had to walk.
- No mention of an innkeeper offering a stable in Scripture
- Wrong – Wise men came to a house!

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## The Wonder of the Manger

5  **Luke 2:7**

- *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.*

- So Christ was born in a manger.
- But why must we assume the manger was in the city? Or why do we assume the innkeeper offered them room?
- Tradition.

6  **Travel Back to Genesis 35**

- *And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel. 16 ¶ And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labor. 17 And it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also. 18 And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin. 19 And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. 20 And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day. 21 ¶ And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Eder.*

7  **The Names of Benjamin**

- 1 • Child was given two names
  - Ben-oni = “son of my sorrow” or “son of sorrows”
  - Benjamin = “son of my right hand” (at the right hand was a position of power)
- 2 • Isaiah 53 – Christ called “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”
- Jesus pictured at the right hand of God
  - Acts 7:55-56; Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; Hebrews 1:3,13; Hebrews 8:1, 10:12, 12:2

8  **The Place of Benjamin’s Birth**

- 1 • *And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: ...*
  - Ephrath = “fruitfulness”
  - Changed later to “Ephratah” = “The Lord’s Fruitfulness”

- 2 • Bethlehem = “house of bread”
  - 2 Bethlehems near Jerusalem, but only 1 Bethlehem-Ephratah
  - (correctly identified by Herod’s scribes from Micah 5:2)
  - “The Bread from the Lord’s Fruitfulness”
  - “I am the Bread of Life” (John 6:33,35,48)

## 9 **Events During Benjamin’s Birth**

- 1 • Rachel died and was buried near Bethlehem
- Israel mourned her one mile away near the tower of Eder (literally “Migdal-Edar”) after burying Rachel
- Rachel means “little (ewe) lamb”
- 2 • Jews always regarded Bethlehem as a holy place associated with death
  - Jesus was “born to die”
  - Proverbs 18:10 -- tower
  - Jesus was the lamb of God

## 10 **No room in the inn**

- Leviticus 15:19-23 (YLT)

– *And when a woman hath an issue—blood is her issue in her flesh—seven days she is in her separation, and any one who is coming against her is unclean till the evening. And anything on which she lieth in her separation is unclean, and anything on which she sitteth is unclean; and any one who is coming against her bed doth wash his garments, and hath bathed with water, and been unclean till the evening. And any one who is coming against any vessel on which she sitteth doth wash his garments, and hath washed with water, and been unclean till the evening. And if it is on the bed, or on the vessel on which she is sitting, in his coming against it, he is unclean till the evening.*

## 11 **No room in the inn (2)**

- A woman who had a child automatically became ceremonially unclean.
  - If a woman had a child in a common living area, anyone who shared that area was also ceremonially unclean and would have to be set apart for 7 days and then be ritually washed before they could worship again.
- For this reason, no one wanted an about-to-give-birth woman as a visitor. In other words, one “nigh-to-be-delivered” knew she couldn’t get a hotel room.

## 12 **Migdal-Eder**

- Migdal = “tower” Eder=“flock”
  - A “tower” was a high hill that gave a good view of surrounding territory
  - Often, someone later built a fortress or lookout tower on top of the hill.

## 13 **Significance of Migdal-Edar**

- Means “tower of the flock”
  - Large hill there used by shepherds to watch the sheep
  - Only Passover lambs raised here (because like Rachel, they were to die)
  - Passover lambs
    - Came through the sheep gate into Jerusalem – same gate through which Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey just before His death
    - Grazed on special land on which NO unclean animals were allowed

## 14 **Proverbs 18:10**

- *The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.*

- Jesus is the tower (our Migdal) for all of us in the flock (Eder). Only in Him are we safe!

#### 15 **Migdal-Eder**

- 720 sacrificial lambs were required every year (2/day for 360 days)
- Raised in Bethlehem
  - So if you said “Bethlehem” and “lamb,” everyone knew you were talking about sacrificial lambs.
- Lambs raised 1000+ paces outside of town; those destined for sacrifice kept closer.

#### 16 **The Manger at Migdal-Eder**

- Ceremonially clean used only for Passover lambs
- No other animals allowed
- Kept clean at all times
- Anointed with oil by priests on regular basis
- Stable used only during inclement weather, or when ewes were giving birth; almost always empty and clean

#### 17 **Jewish Targum**

- Jews have the right location; wrong timing.
- 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.*”
  - The targumim were spoken paraphrases, explanations, and expansions of the Jewish scriptures that a Rabbi would give in the common language of the listener.

#### 18 **Swaddling cloths**

- Sacrificial lambs had to be spotless, without blemish and without scars.
- Once Passover lambs were birthed:
  - the priestly shepherds would routinely place the lambs in the hewn depression of a limestone rock known as a “manger”

#### 19 **Swaddling cloths (2)**

- The shepherds would then “wrap the newborn lambs in swaddling clothes,” preventing them from thrashing about and harming themselves “until they had calmed down” so they could be inspected for the quality of being “without spot or blemish”
  - Source: *Mishnah*, the Jewish oral tradition & Alfred Edersheim, the Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah

#### 20 **Micah 4:8**

- *And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem.*
  - “Tower of the flock” = Migdal-Eder
  - “strong hold of the daughter of Zion” = high hill outside Bethlehem at Migdal-Eder
  - “first dominion” = first rule and dominion of God; accompanied by the coming of God’s kingdom

#### 21 **The Real Nativity Story**

- Caesar Augustus (literally “the supreme one”) decrees a census and tax
  - Joseph is forced to return to his hometown of Bethlehem; Mary is not required to go but accompanies him so she can be with

him during the birth of the child.

- There is no room in the inn.
- Joseph has been told by an angel that this child is the Son of God (Matthew 1:20-23).

## 22 **Matthew 1:20-23**

- *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. 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.*

## 23 **The Real Nativity Story (2)**

- Having grown up in Bethlehem, Joseph would have known the prophetic significance of Micah 4:8 – that the Messiah would be proclaimed from Migdal-Edar
- He knew there was a sheltered, clean, seldom-used manger there which could afford some privacy.

## 24 **The Real Nativity Story (3)**

- Finding it empty, Mary gives birth to the ultimate Passover Lamb
  - The manger was dedicated for use in raising Passover lambs which were killed as a sign or type of the true Lamb of God.
  - Jesus--the Passover Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world--was born in a ceremonially clean stable as God sovereignly directed a perfectly executed plan to bring about our salvation.

## 25 **The Real Nativity Story (4)**

- Angelic host proclaims to shepherds **“in the same country”** (Luke 2:8-20) the birth of the Christ child.
  - These shepherds tended the Passover lambs.
- They **“came with haste”** (Luke 2:16) to see the child in a manger.
  - They did not hunt from manger to manger.
  - They made a “bee-line” straight to the only manger they knew which was holy and set apart to God.

## 26 **Mangers Made of Stone**

- Israelis made mangers out of stone instead of wood
  - Wood too precious; stone plentiful
  - Wood would decay too quickly; stone endures
  - Wood could not be cleansed easily; stone washes better
- Jesus is our Rock, our Fortress, our High Tower

## 27 **The Manger -- Recap**

- Jesus
  - Bread of Life born in the “House of Bread of the Lord’s Fruitfulness”
  - Passover Lamb born in:
    - Manger dedicated to Passover lambs and kept ceremonially clean
    - A place associated with death because He was born to die
  - Shepherds tending Passover lambs rush to manger at Migdal-Edar (there was no star to guide them)

## 28 **The Wonder of the Temple Dedication**

### 29 **Luke 2:21-38**

- And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. 22 And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord: 23 (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) 24 And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons.

### 30 **Luke 2:21-38**

- 25 ¶ And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Ghost was upon him. 26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, 28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

### 31 **Luke 2:21-38**

- 29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: 30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, 31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; 32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. 33 And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. 34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; 35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

### 32 **Luke 2:21-38**

- 36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; 37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. 38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

### 33 **So Many Wonders....**

- Verse 27 – Simeon came “by the Spirit” – God brought him there with precise timing
  - First praises God
  - Then gives very precise words to Mary
    - Child set for “fall and rising again of many”
    - “A sign which shall be spoken against”
    - “A sword shall pierce through thy own soul also”


- Anna is the “second witness” required by the Law to testify to the truth

### 34 **A Fall and Rising Again**

- You must recognize you are a sinner before you can become a saint
- Death before resurrection
- Death to sin, then raised to “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6)
- From abject poverty (we are nothing without Christ) to being “joint-heirs with Christ”

### 35 **Mary’s Heart Was Pierced**

- Pharisees constantly alluded to Jesus’ questionable birth.
  - John 8:19 – “Where is thy father?”
    - This is no picnic for Joseph either....
  - John 8:38-42
    - “Abraham is our father.”
    - “We be not born of fornication....”

- John 8:46-49 – “Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan?”
  - Accusing him of being a half-breed born of a Samaritan father and Jewish mother; reveals their prejudice.
- 36**  **An Offering of Doves**
- Mary and Joseph offered two turtle doves or two pigeons in the purification rites at the Temple when Jesus was 40 days old.
  - The Law of Moses required a woman to bring a lamb and a pigeon or turtledove for an offering when her days of purification were ended (Leviticus 12:5-7).
  - But the Law also stipulated that if someone could not afford to bring a lamb, they could bring a pair of turtledoves or pigeons (Leviticus 5:7).
- The fact that Mary brought a pair of birds shows they were still poor – having not yet received the gifts from the magi.

### **37** The Wonder of the Star and the Magi

#### **38** **Matthew 2:1-18**

- Magi saw star and came from the East to Jerusalem looking for the new king.
  - Came for the purpose of worshipping Him.
  - Star disappeared as they drew near to Jerusalem so they inquired of Herod’s scholars where Christ should be born (2:4).
  - Star reappeared and led them to a HOUSE (not a manger – 2:9-11) where the “young child” (not a baby) was.
  - Magi warned in a dream and returned “another way” instead of returning to Herod.

#### **39** **Who Were the Magi?**

- Parthians – Gentile kings from Parthian kingdom to East of Palestine.
  - Often called the “king-makers.”
  - During Middle Ages, legend arose that there were three kings – Caspar, Balthazar, and Melchior.
  - Most magi adopted the worship of the Persian leader Zoroaster who practiced a monotheistic worship of Ahura Masda.
  - Specialists in Astronomy

#### **40** **Who Were the Magi? (2)**

- These magi were different, however. If they had worshiped Ahura Masda, they would not have come to worship Jesus.
- They were looking for a sign of the King of Kings – a star out of Jacob (Numbers 24:17).
  - Descendants of magi over whom Daniel had become chief magi (Daniel 2:48).

#### **41** **Daniel 2:48**

- *Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.*

#### **42** **Daniel’s Influence of the Magi**

- Their chief (2:48)
- Plot against Daniel came from satraps (governors) not from magi (6:4-9).
- Many Jews remained behind in Babylon at the end of the exile and were influenced by Daniel’s Messianic prophecies.
  - Perhaps he taught them Numbers 24:17 about the “Star out of Jacob” being associated with a new “Scepter” rising in Israel.

43  **Numbers 24:17-19**

*I shall see him, but not now:*

*I shall behold him, but not night:*

*There shall come a Star out of Jacob,*

*And a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel,*

*And shall smite the corners of Moab,*

*And destroy all the children of Sheth.*

*And Edom shall be a possession,*

*Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies;*

*And Israel shall do valiantly.*

*Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion,*

*And shall destroy him that remaineth of the city.*

44  **Gifts of the Magi**

- Gold – The Kingly Reign of Christ
- Frankincense – The Priesthood of Christ
- Myrrh – The Sacrificial Death of Christ

45  **World Expected a Jewish King**


- Ancient historians wrote about rumors that someone from Judaea would eventually rule the world
  - Suetonius – A Roman historian
  - Tacitus – Roman historian – wrote that a Jewish ruler would have a universal empire
  - Josephus – Jewish historian said that one from Judaea would rule the inhabitable earth

46  **Theories About the Star**

- Theories about the star:
  - Planet Jupiter
  - Conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn, and their moons making a fish in the sky near 2 B.C.
  - Low hanging meteor
  - Comet
- Problems:
  - Stars and planets not visible during the day.
  - Meteor would not last long enough.
  - The "star" changed directions; comets travel in straight lines.

47  **A Star To Navigate By**

- Remained in western sky long enough for magi to make travel preparations and travel.
- Star disappears when magi near Jerusalem.
  - Magi consult Herod's scholars = Bethlehem
- Star reappears (Matthew 2:9) and now travels from North to Southeast.
- Rests over an individual house.
  - Try picking a star that is over just your house!

48  **What Was this Star?**

- God Himself

- “Bright and morning star” (Rev. 22:16)
- “Star out of Jacob” (Numbers 24:17)
- The Shekinah cloud of glory
  - Big enough to lead a nation through the wilderness (Exodus 24:17)
  - Visible day and night (Exodus 13:21)
  - Capable of positioning over an individual house (just as it did over the Tabernacle)

## 49 The Wonder of the Tabernacle

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### **The Encampment**

- All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).
  - This includes the book of Numbers!
  - Nu. 23:28 *So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor which overlooks the wasteland.*
  - Nu. 24:1- 2... *he set his face toward the wilderness ... And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe; and the Spirit of God came upon him. (NASB)*
- What did Balaam see?

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### **From the Book of Numbers**

- While that is indeed an awesome picture, does the Bible tell us exactly what the encampment Balaam saw looked like?
  - Yes!!! Where?
  - Numbers chapter 2!!!!
  - That's right, the "boring" book of Numbers!
  - Let's take a look.

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### **Numbers 2:1-7**

- Num 2:1-2 *Now the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "The sons of Israel shall camp, each by his own standard, with the banners of their fathers' households; they shall camp around the tent of meeting at a distance. Now those who camp on the east side toward the sunrise shall be of the standard of the camp of Judah, ... Those who camp next to him shall be the tribe of Issachar, ... then comes the tribe of Zebulun, the total of the numbered men of the camp of Judah: 186,400*

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### **And More Details....**

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### **How Did They Camp?**



- Do you see it yet? Do you see the awesome truth in those numbers? Isn't it exciting?
- Still not sure?
  - How about if we insert the tabernacle in the middle and then group the tribes around the tabernacle, just like it said in Numbers 2: 1-2?
- The Significance of Judah
  - Had to come through Judah to get to the only gate to the Tabernacle.
  - Jesus is the "Lion of the Tribe of Judah" (Hosea 5:14; Revelation 5:5)

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### **A Child King**

- Matthew 2:9 – Jesus is a young child.
  - *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.*
  - Word indicates a toddler, not a baby – typically 15-20 months old.
  - This is why Herod chooses to kill all babies 2 years old and younger “according to the time” which he had been told by the wise men.

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### **Guard the Wonder**

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### **Where the Modern Nativity Story Fails**

- No star over the manger.
- No magi at the manger.
- No donkeys, cattle, etc. in the manger.
- Manger not made of wood, but of stone.
- Magi not guided by conjunction of planets, but by the Shekinah glory of God until it stands over one individual house.
- Magi see Jesus as a toddler—not a baby—and in a house, not a manger.

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### **The Nativity Story Detour**

- Why do Christians get such a fundamental bit of our faith history so wrong?
  - Midnight, December 24, 1223 -- Francis of Assisi tried to recreate the scene of Christ's birth to help people understand the nativity
    - Built manger of wood which was plentiful to him.
    - Brought wise men into the story to “condense” the story and get all the elements into the scene.
    - Put ox and donkey in scene based on wrong interpretation of Isaiah 1:3 – “*the ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib.*”

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### **A Warning from History**

- Because of Francis of Assisi's devout and pious life, his manger scene became the model copied by others.
- Today, well-meaning Bible-believing churches continue to replicate his errors.

- But we have a responsibility to verify everything with the Word of God.
  - **God's Word – not tradition – must always remain our final authority for faith and practice!**
- 64  **Isaiah 9:6**
- *He shall be called Wonderful...*
    - One mathematician using population statistics has looked at the mathematical odds of one person fulfilling just 8 of the 300 Messianic prophecies including:
      - Born in Bethlehem
      - Entered Jerusalem on a donkey
      - Crucified with thieves
    - Odds were 1:100,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000

### 65 **The Greatest Wonder of All**

- This baby was born to die.
- He was born to die for you and me.
- He did it because He loved us and wanted to deliver us from a certain and deserved destination of the Lake of Fire.
- It truly is Amazing Grace!

### 66 **Give God the Glory!**

- God sovereignly attended to every detail of Christ's life so He fulfilled 300 prophecies made more than 500 years before His birth.
- We only looked at a few:
  - Born in a ceremonially clean and typically perfect manger.
  - Guided descendants of Daniel's magi with a star that "had a mind of its own" to the Christ child.

### 67 **What Will Be Your Christmas Gift?**

- Give Him your praises to His glory.
- Give your family your time to talk about Him in awe and in reverent tones.
- Give your family the experience of unselfish non-commercial giving:
  - Give to missions to tell others about Him.
  - Give to your church to continue its mission of equipping saints.
- Give Christ yourself – your time and heart.