



Christmas PAST
PRESENT
FUTURE

A three-part study looking at the truth behind the tradition



- Christmas Past
 - The History & Origin of Christmas
- Christmas Present
 - The Ultimate Gift
- Christmas Future
 - Through the Lens of Prophecy

A three-part study looking at the truth behind the tradition



- Christmas Present
 - The greatest gift ever given!
 - It's all in the preparation!
 - Angelic announcements
 - The shepherds, a manger & a Lamb

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Christmas Present

It's all in the preparation

- For 4000 years God had been preparing for the 1st Christmas
- He was giving the greatest Gift to the world, so everything had to be just right

Christmas Present

It's all in the preparation

- The announcement had been made 6000 years ago - [Genesis 3:15](#)
- A specific family had been chosen – [Genesis 12](#)
- The Passover had been instituted – [Exodus 12](#)
- The Law had been given – [Exodus/Leviticus](#)
- The Monarchy had been established – [2 Sam 7](#)
- The location had been set – [Micah 5:2](#)

Christmas Present

The Announcement

15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Genesis 3:15

Christmas Present

The Announcement

- 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.
- 15 Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.
- 16 For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.

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The Family

- 1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:
- 2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:
- 3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

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The Passover

- 3 Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house:
- 5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year

Exodus 12:3-5

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The Law

- 4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,
- 5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Galatians 4:4-5

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The Monarchy

- 12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.
- 13 He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

2 Samuel 7:12-13

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The Monarchy

10 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

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The Monarchy

- After Herod the Great died in c.4 B.C. Archelaus (his son) was placed over Judea as “Entharch” by Caesar Augustus
- Archelaus was rejected and replaced by a Roman procurator named Caponius
- The legal power of the Sanhedrin was immediately restricted and the adjudication of capital cases was lost.
- Priests officially mourned
 - *“Woe unto us for the sceptre has departed from Judah and the Messiah has not come!”* - Jerusalem Talmud f.24

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The Location

2 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

- So Bethlehem was chosen as the location...
- But why?

Christmas Present

Why Bethlehem?

- Abraham was chosen – he was a man of faith, willing to offer his own son as a sacrificial offering – *“God will provide Himself a Lamb”*
- The Passover was instituted as a model in advance and required the shed blood of a lamb
- The Law was instituted, with the sacrificial system – *“without the shedding of blood there is no remission”* -
Hebrews 9:22
- The Monarchy was necessary, and David was a shepherd & man after God’s own heart – *1 Sam 13:14*
- But why Bethlehem? Was it just a random choice?

Christmas Present

Why Bethlehem?

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 - *“God will provide Himself **a Lamb**”*
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Christmas Present

Angelic Announcements

- We can all agree that this is not a normal occurrence!!
- So why do they appear on certain occasions?

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Angelic Announcements

- 15 And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time,
- 16 And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:

Genesis 22:15-18

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Angelic Announcements

17 That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

18 And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

Genesis 22:15-18

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Angelic Announcements

7 The LORD God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence.

Genesis 24:7

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Angelic Announcements

23 For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off.

Exodus 23:23

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Angelic Announcements

- Gabriel appears to Zacharias
- Then to Mary...
- Then to Joseph...
- Then to... Shepherds???



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8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

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.

Luke 2:8-9



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.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

Luke 2:10-12



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.

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.

Luke 2:13-15



16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

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 2:16-18



19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

20 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 2:19-20



Who were the Shepherds?

- Do we know anything about the shepherds to whom the angels appeared the night of Jesus' birth?
- The traditional view is that they were ordinary shepherds who were the “outcasts of society,”
- It is suggested that this is why the Angels appeared to them:
- *“God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” 1 Cor 1:27*

Who were the Shepherds?

- The Mishnah advised against a number of professions, including that of shepherd.
 - *A man should not teach his son to be an [donkey] driver or a camel driver, or a barber or a sailor, or a herdsman or a shopkeeper, for their craft is the craft of robbers* (M. Kidd. 4.14).
- But the Bible described the God of Israel as a Shepherd - Psalm 23
- Some of Israel's greatest national heroes—including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David—were shepherds.

Who were the Shepherds?

- God promised that He will someday shepherd Israel - [Isa. 40:11](#); [Ezek. 34:11–15](#)
- The work of Israel's future Messiah as that of a shepherd - [Micah. 5:2–4](#)
- Jesus described Himself as the “good Shepherd” who “lays down His life for the sheep” - [John 10:11](#)

Who were the Shepherds?

- So who were the shepherds in Luke 2?
- ...and why did God choose to send His angels to them?
- What significance did they have?
- ...and what does the Bible really say?
- Remember: Tradition makes the Word of no effect! - **Mark 7:13**

Traditional Errors



Bethlehem's Shepherds

- Alfred Edersheim, was a nineteenth-century Jewish scholar and convert to Christianity
- Edersheim highlighted that the flocks kept around Bethlehem were destined for temple sacrifice - **something obfuscated by tradition**
- The shepherds keeping watch over these sheep knew very well the intended purpose of the lambs under their care.
- Their job was to guard their sheep from becoming injured or blemished.

Bethlehem's Shepherds

- So it was to those watching over animals destined for temple sacrifice that the angels announced Jesus' birth.
- The arrival of the ultimate Lamb of God was revealed to those responsible for watching over the sacrificial lambs that had always pointed toward Him.
- Bethlehem was chosen as the place of Christ's birth for precisely this reason!

Bethlehem's Shepherds

- In the Jewish Mishnah: (Shekelim Ch7: Section 4)
- *“The lambs that were raised in this particular place were particularly special in that they were from a unique flock that was made up of sheep that were designated to be sacrificed in Jerusalem, and in particular, the sacrificial lambs for the Passover sacrifices”*
- The men who kept them were specifically trained for this task, & were educated in what an animal to be sacrificed had to be like.

Bethlehem's Shepherds

- Their job was to make sure that none of the animals were hurt, or damaged because they had to be 'without blemish' according to the Torah
- And for that reason these lambs when they were born were wrapped in "swaddling bands" to protect them from injury,
- So, being themselves under rabbinical care, these shepherds would maintain a ceremonially clean 'stable' for a birthing place

Bethlehem's Shepherds

- According to the Talmud, all sheep found in the area “from Jerusalem as far as Migdal Eder” [Bethlehem] & on both sides were deemed to be holy and consecrated
- They could *only* be used for sacrifices in the temple...
- ...in particular for the Peace offerings and Passover sacrifices.

Bethlehem's Shepherds

- *“Luke's original audience would have immediately picked up on the religious significance of the Bethlehem shepherds watching their flocks by night”*
- *“Aware of the Tanakh (Old Testament) and the Jewish Temple worship of the day, they would have known that when you said Bethlehem, you said "sacrificial lambs". The hills around Bethlehem were home to the thousands of lambs used in ritual worship in the Temple”. - Harold Smith*

Bethlehem's Shepherds

- *“As a boy from Bethlehem, King David would likely have tended sheep destined for the daily offerings or used in the sacrifices on the high holidays in these very hills”.*
- *“Every day, according to the Torah, two lambs were required for a daily sacrifice in the Temple, meaning that 730 were needed each year plus the tens of thousands more lambs needed for Pesach (Passover) as well as for the other religious rituals”. - Harold Smith*

Bethlehem's Shepherds

- *Everyone in Israel recognised Bethlehem as being synonymous with sacrificial lambs.*
– Harold Smith

¹⁹ But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

Luke 2:19

Bethlehem's Shepherds

- For 1st Century Christians:
- *Hearing that Yeshua was born in Bethlehem would have automatically triggered an image of the Lamb of YHVH who takes away the sin [of the World].*
- *With that in mind, it's easy for us to imagine one of Luke's listeners saying, 'Of course the Lamb of YHVH would originate in Bethlehem - all the lambs for sacrifice came from there.'*

– Harold Smith

Micah's Prophecy

² 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

- Do you know what *else* Micah prophesied?

O Holy Night

- All the places to reside in Bethlehem were full
- Jesus was therefore ‘born in a manger’
 - Tradition has told us that the Inn Keeper directed them to his/a stable
- The Shepherd’s were in the fields around Bethlehem
- The angels appeared to announce Jesus’ birth (the Messiah!)
- The angles gave the Shepherd’s a sign
 - But no directions!

The Sign!

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

Luke 2:1-18

The Sign!

¹² And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find **A babe** wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in **THE manger.**

Luke 2:1-18

- The Greek text indicates they were to find **A babe** lying in **THE manger**
- Thus a babe lying in the manger itself would be that which would confirm the words of the angel
 - **There was something significant about this manger**

A Reason To Celebrate

- The Shepherds were fearful & afraid
– and no doubt a little bemused!

²⁰ 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

- Why would just seeing a baby in a stable next to an Inn cause such overwhelming joy?
- Because they didn't go to a stable next to an Inn!
- There may not have even been an Inn!

No Room at the Inn?

- The word translated 'inn' is properly 'guest-chamber'
 - It is more likely this was an annex built onto the family home
 - The reason there was 'no room' was may have been more to do with the laws of ceremonial purity than Bethlehem being 'fully booked'
 - Lev 12 / 15:19-30
- Tradition has invented 'Hotel Bethlehem' and an Inn Keeper, who was benevolent enough to allow Mary and Joseph to take shelter in his stable alongside oxen and cattle!

A Reason To Celebrate

- So where did they stay?
- ...and what made the Shepherds so ecstatic?

²⁰ 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

Micah's Other Prophecy

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.

Micah 4:8

The Tower of the Flock

- The Hebrew phrase tower of the flock here, is "migdal edar" [mig-dawl ay-der]
- It refers to a particular tower that was built in ancient times to watch over the valley on the edge of Bethlehem, to protect the city,
- The name means "watch tower of the flock"
- Several of these towers are recorded in scripture
 - We find them in Judges 8:71, 9:46, & 9:51; and in 2 Kings 9:17, 18:8; and in Nehemiah 3:1

The Tower of the Flock

- Rabbi Short states:
- *“This Migdal Eder was not the watchtower for the ordinary flocks that pastured on the barren sheep ground beyond Bethlehem... but it lay close to the town on the road to Jerusalem”*. **Book 2 chapter 6**
- Migdal Eder, is also mentioned in the Jewish Targums and is translated *“The anointed one of the flock of Israel”*

The Tower of the Flock

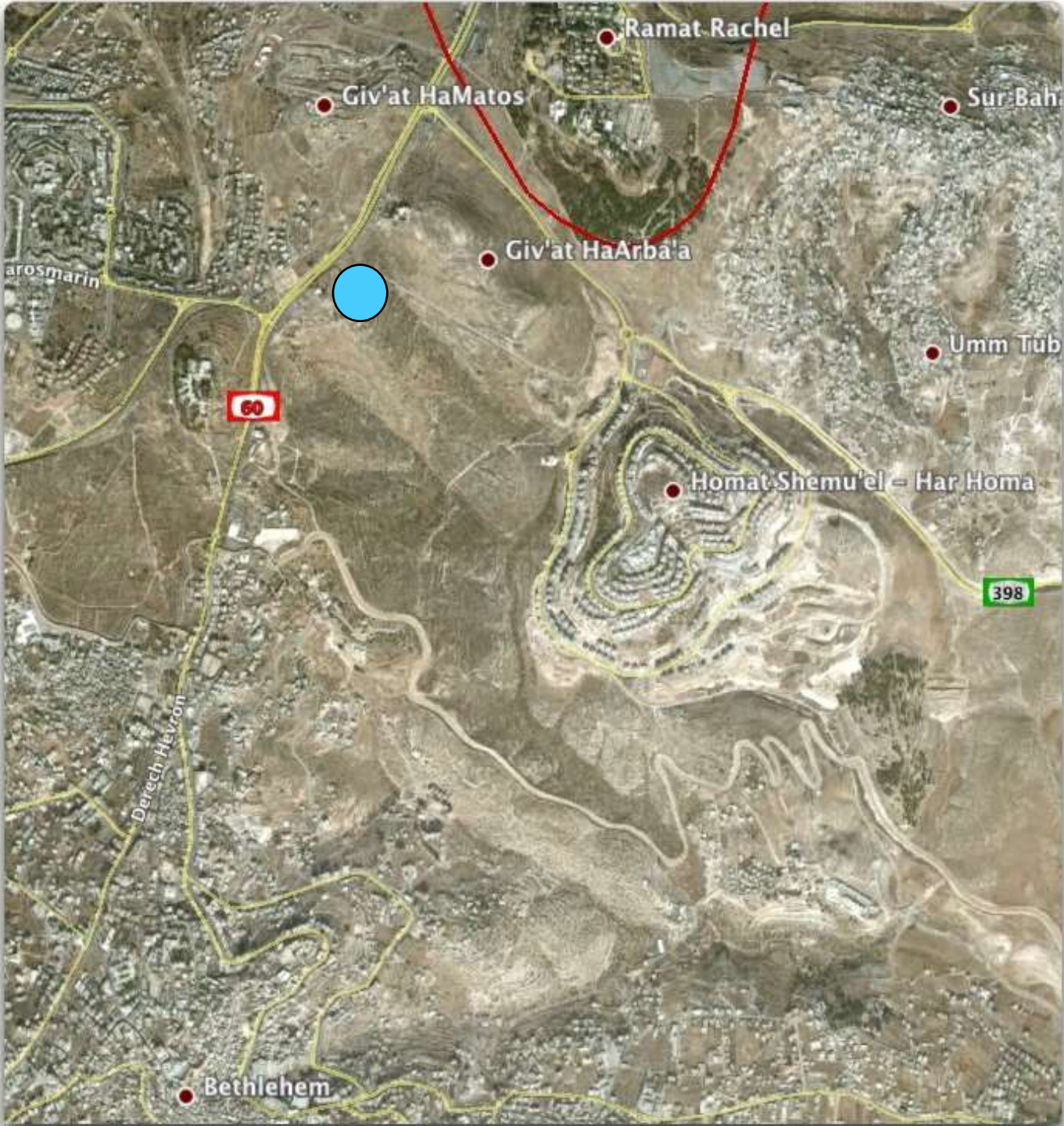
¹⁹ And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.

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 Edar.

Genesis 35:19-21





Ramat Rachel

Giv'at HaMatos

Sur Bah

Giv'at HaArba'a

Umm Tub

Homat Shemu'el - Har Homa

Bethlehem

60

398

Derech Hevron

arosmarin

The Tower of the Flock

- It was built as a watch tower...
- ...to be used by shepherds for protection from robbers and wild animals
- Given the significance of the sheep around Bethlehem (destined for Temple sacrifice), it was an important look-out to guard against trouble
- But it served a dual purpose...

The Tower of the Flock

- During lambing season the sheep were brought to the tower from the fields, as the lower level functioned as the birthing room for sacrificial lambs.
- Being themselves under special rabbinical care, these shepherds would strictly maintain a ceremonially clean birthing place.

The Tower of the Flock

- Once birthed, the shepherds would routinely place the lambs in the hewn depression of a limestone rock known as "the manger"
- They would "wrap the new-born 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"
 - *Jewish oral tradition & Alfred Edersheim, the Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah.*

The Tower of the Flock

- Approaching this subject from the Hebrew perspective will show, that while swaddling "cloths" were used in the handling of newborn babies, swaddling "bands" (as referenced in Job 38:9) were used for subduing animals prior to sacrifice. These "swaddling bands" were strips of gauze-like cloth used to restrain a lamb being prepared for inspection before sacrifice to prevent thrashing that they not "blemish" themselves.

The Tower of the Flock

- A sacrifice had to be "bound" (Hebrew `aqad) in order to be valid. "Binding" an animal for sacrifice is the Hebrew akeida (ibid, Hebrew Glossary and Terminology); specifically mentioned in Abraham's "binding" of Yitzchak (Isaac) for sacrifice to the Almighty in Genesis 22:9
 - *Jewish oral tradition & Alfred Edersheim, the Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah.*

The Tower of the Flock

- So there was no need for the angels to give these shepherds directions to the birth place, because they already knew it!
- These were the men who raised sacrificial lambs that were sacrificed in the Temple, that were birthed, laid in a manger & wrapped in swaddling bands at Migdal Edar
- When the angelic announcement came, they knew exactly where to go!

The Tower of the Flock

- They would also no doubt be aware of the prophecy from Micah that the Messiah would make His appearance to Israel at their tower!

The Tower of the Flock

- ...as Luke 2 indicates, the sign of the manger could only mean the manger at the base of the Tower of the Flock, as it is found in the original Greek wording of **Luke 2:7,12 and 16!**
- You cannot explain the meaning or direction of the sign they were given or their response unless you have the right manger, the right shepherds and the proper Hebraic perspective.

The Tower of the Flock

- When there was no room for them in the 'guest chamber' ...
- ...Joseph had to find shelter and a place for Mary to give birth
- On their route into Bethlehem they would travel right passed this Tower of the Flock
- And it was to this place that Joseph takes Mary
- And it was in this special place at Migdal Edar that Christ was born, fulfilling the prophecy of Micah

The Tower of the Flock

- Prophetically, Migdal Edar - (the tower of the flock), is the exact place in Bethlehem for the Christ to be born,
- God was faithful in assuring Israel that he would fulfill his promises to them of the kingdom

The Tower of the Flock

- Prominent Jewish writers concluded in the Midrash,
 - (an early Jewish commentary on the O.T.)
- That of all the places in Israel, it would be the “Migdal Eder”, The tower of the flock in Bethlehem, where the arrival of the Messiah would be declared first!

Micah's Other Prophecy

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.

Micah 4:8

Micah's Other Prophecy

- Warren Wiersbe, comments:
- *“As the pregnant woman must deliver the child, So Judah must be taken captive to Babylon. It would be a time of pain but it would eventually bring blessing. God promised to deliver them and restore them, and Micah uses the prophecy of the Babylonian captivity of Judah as a pledge to guarantee the birth of Christ at “Migdal Edar” at Bethlehem, which is exactly where it took place!”*

Micah's Other Prophecy

- Warren Wiersbe, comments:
- *“Micah prophesied that as surely as the Babylonians would soon carry away Judah in the north, so the messiah would come and establish his kingdom, & here Micah pledges that as surely as Babylon would carry away Israel, into captivity, so the messiah would arrive at the tower of the flock. And of course Micah goes on with the prophesy in Ch. 5”*

The Tower of the Flock

- *Migdal Eder, the Tower of the Flock, was the place where lambs destined for the Temple were born and raised. Every firstborn male lamb from the area around Bethlehem was considered holy, set aside for sacrifice in Jerusalem. Generations of hereditary shepherds tended the sacred flocks.*
 - Why A Manger? - Bodie and Brock Thoene

Christmas Present

- The Greatest present ever given!
- God's Son, given as the Lamb who would take away the sins of the world.
- Born in the town of the sacrificial lambs
- Inspected by the very shepherds who would approve the lambs to be offered in Jerusalem to atone for sin!
- Laid in *the* manger, and wrapped in swaddling bands to prevent any blemish
- He is the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world!



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