

## Jesus' Prophetic Birthday:

Based on my knowledge of Scripture, historical facts, the Biblical calendar and Jewish tradition I would like to present the following Christmas story as a plausible way in which the events surrounding Jesus' birth occurred.

It is Saturday night, Kislev 25, in the Jewish year 3756. It is the first night of Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication and the Feast of Light, December 6, 6 BCE. The angel Gabriel comes to the Virgin Mary with a message from God. She will conceive in her womb, bear a son and name him Jesus (Yashua – Joshua – “*I AM SALVATION*”). The Holy Spirit will come upon her, and the power of the Most High will overshadow her; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.

It wasn't until the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries that the idea of fixing the date of Christ's birth came into being. And with it came heated controversy among the church leaders. Origen (185 – 254 CE) strongly recommended against such an innovation. He said, “In the Scriptures, no one is recorded to have kept a feast or held a great banquet on his birthday. It is only sinners who make great rejoicings over the day in which they were born into the world.”

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, various groups proposed eight specific dates during six different months for Jesus' birth. These dates were: January 6<sup>th</sup>, March 28<sup>th</sup>, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, the 24<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup> day of Pharmuthi (April/May), 25<sup>th</sup> day of Pachon (about May), May 20<sup>th</sup>, November 18<sup>th</sup>, and December 25<sup>th</sup>. The Eastern Church chose January 6<sup>th</sup> (January 6<sup>th</sup> is called Epiphany (Appearing) but was first observed as the date of Jesus' baptism.) ... a date the Greeks had celebrated as the birth of the god Dionysus and the Egyptians as the birth of the god Osiris. Pagans commonly celebrated the birthdays of their gods, however in the Bible a birthday is never celebrated to the true God, who being eternal has no birth or day of origin.

Although one of the last dates to be proposed, December 25<sup>th</sup> was the one finally accepted by the leadership of the Western Church (The Armenian Church uses January 6<sup>th</sup> and the Eastern Orthodox Church uses January 7<sup>th</sup>). It was made popular by Pope Liberius in 354 CE and became the rule in the West when the first “Christ mass” was officiated by Pope Sixtus III. December 25<sup>th</sup> coincides with the pagan feast day of *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti* or “Birthday of the Unconquered Sun” which was celebrated as the birth of the god, Mithras, “the conqueror of darkness.” This day fell within the Roman weeklong celebration of Saturnalia, a feast honoring the renewal of the sun at the winter solstice (The winter solstice is the shortest day of the year):

Mithra was an ancient Persian god of light. It was believed that Mithra, an infant god, was born of a rock. For some Romans, Mithra's birthday was the most sacred day of the year. In the later Roman Empire, Mithra blended with Sol Invictus, god of the “unconquered sun.”

<https://www.history.com/topics/natural-disasters-and-environment/winter-solstice>

As to the year of Jesus' birth it too is the subject of much debate. In 525 CE, Pope John I commissioned the scholar Dionysius Exiguus to establish a feast calendar for the Church. Unfortunately, because of insufficient historical data at the time he arrived at a date at least a few years later than the actual event. The Gospels record Jesus' birth as occurring during the reign of Herod the Great. Herod's death according to the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus occurred in the spring of 4 BCE. Therefore, Christ's birth had to take place before that date.

Most current Biblical scholars using modern research methods are in agreement that Jesus' birth occurred in either the months of September or October, at or near the feast of Tabernacles in one of the years of 5 or 4 BCE. With that as a basis, the Virgin Mary would have conceived Jesus during the feast of Hanukkah in the previous year.

The four primary evidences presented in the case of Jesus' birth are as follows:

1. He was born in the years 5 or 4 BCE.
  - a. Based on the date of Herod's death (This date has been contested with some suggesting a date of January 29, 1 BCE as the date of Herod's death. The evidence for his death is based on the observance of a lunar eclipse prior to his death. There were observable lunar eclipses only in the years 5 BCE, 4 BCE and 1BCE.).
  - b. Herod's killing of children under two years of age.
  - c. Jesus' age at his baptism and the beginning of His ministry in connection with the known dates of Tiberius Caesar's reign.
  - d. Jesus death fulfilling the Passover on the correct days.
2. The census of Quirinius.
  - a. The census required everyone to travel to his own city. This would not have occurred during winter.
  - b. Since it involved taxation it would have naturally occurred near the end of the harvest season in late summer or early autumn.
3. The shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. It is generally agreed that this would never occur after October 31 due to the cold temperatures.
4. The evidence surrounding the birth of John the Baptist.
  - a. Zechariah, John the Baptist's father was a priest in the line of Abijah, which stood eighth in the order of service. Each of the twenty-four lines of priests served twice a year in their order beginning on the first day of the month Aviv (Aviv is the first month of God's calendar. It falls within our March/April time frame. The Jewish people currently call this month Nisan.). All the priests served an additional week at each of the three feasts that all the men of Israel were required to attend: Unleavened Bread, Weeks and Tabernacles.
  - b. Therefore, Zechariah would have been serving on the 10<sup>th</sup> week or about mid-June.
  - c. Zechariah and Elizabeth conceived John the Baptist after the angel spoke to Zechariah while he was serving.
  - d. It appears that John the Baptist was born at or near Passover the following year.
  - e. Each year during the Passover meal a special cup of wine (the Cup of Elijah) is set apart awaiting the return of the Prophet Elijah. This is done in accordance with the last two verses in the Old Testament from the prophet Malachi 4:5-6. They read, “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah in the Temple, he used very similar words concerning Zechariah's future son, John the Baptist. The angel said, "And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, **TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN**, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." **Luke 1:16-17**

On the Mount of Transfiguration, three of Jesus' disciples saw Moses and Elijah. After that they asked Jesus about the coming of Elijah. "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also, the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist." **Matthew 17:10-13**

- f. John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin was born six months prior to Jesus. Therefore, Jesus would have been born in September or October at or near the feast of Tabernacles.

*by Michael Gibson, Key2Changes.com*

**Timeline of John the Baptist and Jesus' Conceptions and Births (6-months apart):**

**Pentecost – June/Feast of Weeks/Pentecost (Conception of John the Baptist) Luke 1:1-23**

**Luke 1:5-80**

*Birth of John the Baptist Foretold*

<sup>5</sup> In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a **priest named Zechariah**, of the division of Abijah. And **he had a wife** from the daughters of Aaron, and **her name was Elizabeth**. <sup>6</sup> And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. <sup>7</sup> But they had no child, because *Elizabeth was barren*, and *both were advanced in years*.

<sup>8</sup> Now **while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty**, <sup>9</sup> according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

\* Zachariah was of the division of Abijah. A thousand years earlier, King David had reorganized the priests by families and had created 24 "courses" of priests to minister for a week at a time in the temple (*David's reorganization program is recorded in 1 Chron. 24:3, 4*). Each "course" or "division" ministered twice during the year, accounting for 48 weeks. The other four weeks in the year were at the time of the feasts when they all served as needed in the temple . . . The eighth in the list was Abijah (**1 Chron. 24:10**) . . . Hence, **the eighth division of priests arrived early on the day of Pentecost Sunday, seven weeks later, to minister in the temple** . . . Luke does not tell us which day of the week he was the one honored to burn incense in the temple, but it is likely that he did so on that first morning, Pentecost Sunday. It was the year 3 B.C., for John would be born around the following Passover. (<https://godskingdom.org/studies/books/dr-luke-healing-the-breaches-book-1/chapter-2-zacharias>)

**Sixth Month of Elizabeth's Pregnancy – December/The Feast of Hanukkah (Conception of Jesus) Luke 1:26-45**

**Ninth Month of Elizabeth's Pregnancy, she Gives Birth – March/Passover (Birth of John the Baptist) Luke 1:57-80**

**Ninth Month of Mary's Pregnancy, she Gives Birth (6-months after John the Baptist's Birth) – September/the season of "When the King is in the Field" and near the time of the Feast of Trumpets (Birth of Jesus) Luke 2:1-38**

\* **Elul 7/September 9th 5BC, the Sabbath Reading of "WHEN YOU GO OUT to battle against your enemies," Deuteronomy 21:10-25:19; 23-days later was the beginning of the "Feast of Blowing/Trumpets" (Tishri 1/October 2nd 5BC), when all Israeli King's births began their counting and when all Israeli King's coronation were commenced; and 44-days later was the 8th Day of the "Feast of Tabernacles", also known as "Hossana Rabba/The Great Day of Salvation", fulfilling Mary's 40-days of Purification (Leviticus 12:1-4 & Luke 2:22), the future fulfillment of our Entering into Eternity with God, and the fulfillment of the consolation of Israel, prophesied to Simeon (Luke 2:22-35).**

**Pagans commonly celebrated the birthdays of their gods, however in the Bible a birthday is never celebrated to the true God, who being eternal has no birth or day of origin.**

Mary appropriately Hanukkahs (dedicates – first use for a holy purpose) her body to be the temple of God by saying, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word."

The Holy Spirit impregnates Mary. She now has the Word of God, eternal life and the light of men dwelling in the darkness of her womb. As it is written: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.* (John 1:1-5)

Interestingly, on the first night of Hanukkah many Jews quote this passage of Scripture, "In the beginning God **created** the heavens and the earth. And the earth was **formless and void**, and **darkness** was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be **light**"; and there was **light**." (Genesis 1:1-3)

Coincidentally we are reminded by the Scripture in **John 10:22-39**, that Jesus declared Himself to be the Son of God on Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication and Light in the Temple at Jerusalem.

### I and the Father Are One

<sup>22</sup> At that time the **Feast of Dedication** took place at Jerusalem. It was winter,<sup>23</sup> and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. <sup>24</sup> So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." <sup>25</sup> Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, <sup>26</sup> but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. <sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> **I and the Father are one.**"

<sup>31</sup> The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. <sup>32</sup> Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?" <sup>33</sup> The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God." <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'?" <sup>35</sup> If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—<sup>36</sup> do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?" <sup>37</sup> If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; <sup>38</sup> but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." <sup>39</sup> Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands. **John 10:22-39**

**Forty weeks** after His conception Jesus is born. It is Friday night, Elul 7, in the Jewish year 3756. This corresponds to our Gregorian calendar date of September 9, 5 BCE. It is the beginning of the weekly Sabbath. The Jewish people have a particular name for every Sabbath and they read specific passages of Scripture on those Sabbaths. The one on which Jesus is born is called KiTeitzei, "**WHEN YOU GO OUT to battle against your enemies**". On that Sabbath night Jesus goes forth from the womb. And the next morning in the Temple and in every synagogue Isaiah 54:1-10 is read. It begins this way:

*"Shout for joy, O barren one, you who have borne no child; break forth into joyful shouting and cry aloud, you who have not traveled; for the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous than the sons of the married woman," says the LORD.*" Isaiah 54:1

**Forty weeks** – is the period of human gestation.

**enemies** – 1 John 3:7-9 <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. **The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.** <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.

On the following Sabbath, being the eighth day Jesus is circumcised. The Jewish people call this particular Sabbath, KiTavo, "**When you enter**" (Deuteronomy 26:1). On that day Jesus entered into the Mosaic (Abrahamic Covenant – Genesis 17:1-14 & Affirmed to Moses and God's People in Deuteronomy 30:6-10) Covenant (Mosaic Covenant – Exodus 31:12-17) through His circumcision. And in the Temple and every synagogue the prophet **Isaiah 60:1-22** is read. It begins this way:

*Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth, and deep darkness the peoples; but the LORD will rise upon you, and His glory will appear upon you. And nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes round about, and see; they all gather together, they come to you.*

And in verse six of that passage of Scripture it prophesies the coming of the Magi to see Jesus. It reads this way:

*A multitude of camels will cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba will come; they will bring gold and frankincense, and will bear good news (myrrh - a sweet smelling aroma) of the praises of the LORD.*

Mary waited the prescribed **40 days** for **her purification** from the blood of childbirth before presenting her son, Jesus at the Temple. It was Thursday, **Ethanim** 21, of the Jewish year 3756 or our October 23, 5 BCE. The Jewish people call the day **Hossana Rabba** or "**The Great Day of Salvation**". It is the last day of the **Feast of Tabernacles** (Sukkoth).

**40 DAYS** (i.e. 2022) - from the Sabbath, Friday, September 9<sup>th</sup> at 6pm through Saturday, September 10<sup>th</sup> at 6pm, reading during the Sabbath is "**When you go out**" (Deuteronomy 21:10–25:19), puts us at the end of the two-day Feast time, also known as "the day and hour unknown", a second two day feast period, or one long day, from Sunday, October 16<sup>th</sup> at 6pm through Tuesday, October 18<sup>th</sup> at 6pm, or on the Biblical Calendar, the same day as the "**Eight Day**" (the Beginning of Eternity in Heaven) of the Feast of Tabernacles, known as the "**Great Day of Salvation**".

**her purification** - Leviticus 12:1-4 - "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If a woman conceives and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days. As at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean. <sup>3</sup> And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. <sup>4</sup> Then she shall continue for thirty-three days in the blood of her purifying. **She shall not touch anything holy, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying are completed.**"

**Ethanim** - is the seventh month of God's calendar. It falls within our September/October time frame. The Jewish people currently call this month Tishri.

**Feast of Tabernacles** - In Hebrew the feast is called Sukkoth, which is translated as tent, hut, tabernacle or booth and indicates a temporary dwelling.

i.e. Luke 2:22-35 – *Jesus Presented at the Temple* – <sup>22</sup> And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. . . . <sup>25</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the **consolation** of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. <sup>26</sup> And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's **Christ**. <sup>27</sup> And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child **Jesus**, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, <sup>28</sup> he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, <sup>29</sup> "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation <sup>31</sup> that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." <sup>33</sup> And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother,

“Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed<sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

**consolation** – paraklés (3874) **Messianic salvation**.

**Christ** – Christos (5547) the Messiah – the Salvation of Israel.

**Jesus** – Iésous (2424) “I am Salvation” – the Son of God, the Savior of mankind, Joshua, the name of the Messiah – Yahweh (tetragram name): “Behold the man with raised nail pierced hands”.

**The Feast of Tabernacles is the most joyous feast of the year** for Israel and it has four major themes associated with it. Let’s see how these four themes are linked to Jesus’ first appearance at the Temple.

**The first theme** is the **ingathering of various tree branches**. Jesus, “the **Branch**” spoken of by Isaiah the prophet (Isaiah 11:1-10) concerning the messiah is brought into Jerusalem during the Feast. It was written of Him: “*Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.*”

Jesse was King David’s father. Therefore, the messiah had to be a descendent of King David, which Jesus was according to the genealogies. The shoot or branch in the prophecy can also be rendered from the root Hebrew word **Nazir** meaning “*unpruned vine*” from whence we get the word **Nazarene**. This is why the Bible references Jesus as the **Nazarene** or Jesus from **Nazareth**.

**Nazarene** is a title applied to Jesus, who, according to the **New Testament**, grew up in **Nazareth**, a town in **Galilee**, now in northern **Israel**. The word is used to translate two related terms that appear in the **Greek New Testament**: *Nazarēnos* (Nazarene) and *Nazōraios* (Nazorean). The phrases traditionally rendered as “Jesus of Nazareth” can also be translated as “**Jesus the Nazarene**” or “Jesus the Nazorean”, and the title “Nazarene” may have a religious significance instead of denoting a place of origin.

The **Gospel of Matthew** explains that the title Nazarene is derived from the prophecy “He will be called a Nazorean”, *but this has no obvious Old Testament source*. Some scholars argue that it refers to a passage in the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 11:1, “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.”), with “Nazarene” a Greek reading of the Hebrew *ne-tser* (branch), understood as **a messianic title**. Others point to a passage in the **Book of Judges** which refers to Samson as a **Nazirite**, a word that is just one letter off from Nazarene in Greek.

The **Greek New Testament** uses “**Nazarene**” (a branch) six times (Mark, Luke), while “Nazorean” is used 13 times (Matthew, Mark in some manuscripts, Luke, John, Acts). In the **Book of Acts**, “**Nazorean**” is used to refer to a follower of Jesus, i.e. a **Christian**, rather than an inhabitant of a town. “Notzrim” is the modern Hebrew word for Christians (*No-tsri*, נוצרים) and one of two words commonly used to mean “Christian” in Syriac (*Nasrani*) and Arabic (*Nasrānī*, نصراني).

In Acts, **Paul of Tarsus** is called, “**a ringleader of the sect of the Nazoreans**” (Acts 24:5), thus identifying Nazorean with Christian. Although both “Christianos” (by Gentiles) and “Nazarenes” (by Jews) appear to have been current in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, and both are recorded in the New Testament, the Gentile name “Christian” appears to have won out against “Nazarene” in usage among Christians themselves after the 1st century.

**Modern Hebrew** the word “Notzrim” (נוצרים) is the standard word for **Christians**.

In **Rabbinic** and contemporary **Israeli modern Hebrew**, the term *Notzrim* (plural) (Hebrew: נוצרים), or singular “*Notzri*” (נוצרי) is the general official term for “Christians” and “Christian”.

In **Talmud** and Midrash generally refers to Jewish Christians.

Although **Arab Christians** referred to themselves as *Masīhī* (from *Masīh*, مسيح, “Messiah, Christ”), the term “Nazarene” was adopted into the **Arabic language** as singular *Naṣrani* (Arabic: نصراني, “a Christian”) and plural *Naṣara* (Arabic: نصارى, “Nazarenes, Christians”) to refer to Christians in general. The term “Naṣara” is used many times in the **Qur’an** when referring to them.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazarene\\_\(title\)#cite\\_note-Miller-6](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazarene_(title)#cite_note-Miller-6)

**The second theme** of the feast is **God comes to tabernacle or dwell with His people**. For a week of the festival, Jews live in temporary dwellings or booths made out of tree branches. It is meant to remind them of the Exodus, when God’s presence was manifest among His people, leading and protecting them day and night. Jesus arrives among the people as **Immanuel ... “God With Us”** to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. “*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.*”

**The third theme** of the feast is **the salvation of God’s people**. The angel commanded Joseph to name the child, Jesus because He would save His people from their sins. In Hebrew, Jesus’ name is Yashua or Joshua, which means, “**I AM salvation**”. God told Moses to tell the Israelites that “I AM” (Exodus 3:14) had sent him to deliver them from the Egyptians. In today’s world we just hear a person’s formal name and it has no particular meaning to us. But in Jesus’ day peoples name were actual statements. So, every time Jesus introduced Himself, the people heard the statement, “**I AM salvation**”.

**The fourth theme** of the feast is **great joy**. While the people were rejoicing in God outside the Temple, Jesus was presented before God, in the Temple, as was the custom. At that time old Simeon and Anna were filled with the **joy of the Holy Spirit** and began prophesying because they had seen the **consolation** (*Messianic salvation*) of Israel.

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### **Where was the Birthplace of the Lord Jesus?**

Tradition, not the Bible, says that Jesus' birthplace was in cave over which the Basilica of the Nativity was built in Bethlehem. Roman Emperor Constantine, built a Basilica over this cave in the 4th Century at the request of his mother, Helena. It was destroyed and the present basilica was built by Emperor Justinian in 530 AD. **Origen of Alexandria (185 - 254 AD) wrote that it was generally accepted that Jesus was born in a cave at Bethlehem which could be visited in his day.**

Clearly the city of Jesus' birth was Bethlehem as **Micah 5:2** prophesied:

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

and as the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John confirm. (Matt. 2:1; Luke 2:4, 15; John 7:42). Luke proclaims the birthplace as Bethlehem, "*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.*" **1 Samuel 17:15**, confirms Bethlehem as the City of David, "*But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.*"

#### **But where in Bethlehem was Jesus born?**

The fact is that the New Testament does not mention the exact place in Bethlehem of where Jesus was born. **Nowhere does the Bible record that Jesus was born in stable attended by donkeys, chickens, and cows as many nativity scenes present.** In the past it was speculated that because there was no room for Joseph and Mary in the Inn, and that he was born in the stable behind the inn where the animals were kept. This conjecture is false and is a good example that shows us we should not apply speculation to God's word. All the New Testament specifically says is that Jesus was laid in a manger in Bethlehem.

Although the New Testament does not tell us where in Bethlehem Jesus was born, the Old Testament does. **Micah 4:8** states:

*"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." Thus the Old Testament clearly states that the Messiah would be born at the "**tower of the flock**" (Hebrew: Migdal Edar).*

The phrase "**tower of the flock**" is the Hebrew phrase "Migdal Edar" and means a "**watch tower of the flock**". In ancient times this was a military tower erected to view into the valley on the edge of Bethlehem to protect the city. Several of these military towers are recorded in the Old Testament (See Judges 8:71, 9:46, 9:51; 2 Kings 9:17, 18:8; Nehemiah 3:1). The tower at Bethlehem is first mentioned in **Genesis 35:21**, "*And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar*" ("**tower of Edar**"- Migdal Edar). After Jacob left Bethel he came to **Edar (the tower)** and there Rachel began hard labor and as she delivered Benjamin **she died and was buried there in Ephrathah which is Bethlehem**" (**Gen. 35:19**). After burying Rachel, Jacob moved his flocks beyond the **tower of Edar**. This would pinpoint the location as being near to what is present day Bethlehem. Clearly, this establishes that **Migdal Edar, "the tower of the flock"** was in Bethlehem in Bible times.

The oldest tradition, based upon **Genesis 35:16-20; 48:7**, points to a place one mile north of present-day Bethlehem and 4 miles from Jerusalem. We do not know what were the bounds of ancient Bethlehem when Christ was born there, but we know the area called Bethlehem was larger than it is today. The references to present day Migdal Edar are in reference to present day Bethlehem and not the Bethlehem of biblical times which was certainly greater. **Genesis 35:19** and **48:7** both state that Rachel was buried at "**Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.**"

*"And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to **Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.**" **Genesis 35:19***

*"And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath: and I buried her there in the **way of Ephrath; the same is Bethlehem.**" **Genesis 48:7***

It must be noted that Ephrath or Ephrathah was the ancient name for the area that later was called Bethlehem. According to **Genesis 35:19**, after Jacob buried Rachel, he "*moved his flocks beyond the tower of Edar*" or "*Migdal Edar.*" **The location of Rachel's tomb today is outside, on the outskirts of present-day Bethlehem,** but clearly it was not when Jacob, buried his wife there. Clearly the area which is called Bethlehem in biblical times covered a greater area than does present-day Bethlehem and the Tower of the Flock was in that city.

*This watch tower from ancient times was used by the shepherds for **protection from their enemies and wild beasts.** It was also the place ewes were safely brought to give birth to the lambs. In this sheltered building/cave the priests would bring in the ewes which were about to lamb for protection. **These special lambs came from a unique flock that was designated for sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem.***

Rabbis state, (According to Edersheim in *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah*, in Book 2, Chapter 6), "*This **Migdal Edar 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, leading to the conclusion that the flocks which pastured there were destined for Temple sacrifices." Also, traditional rabbi interpretation of **Genesis 35:23** and **Micah 4:8**, would render, "*He spread his tent beyond Migdal Edar, the place where King Messiah will reveal Himself at the end of days."* What are we to make of all of this information from the writings of the rabbis? First, we know that **Migdal Edar was the watchtower that guarded the Temple flocks that were being raised to serve as sacrificial animals in the Temple.** These were not just any flock and herd. **The shepherds who kept them***

were men who were specifically trained for this royal task. They were educated in what an animal, that was to be sacrificed, had to be and it was their job to make sure that none of the animals were hurt, damaged, or blemished." **These lambs were apparently wrapped in "swaddling clothes" to protect them from injury and also were used to wrap the Lord Jesus.**

Thus, with the establishment of Temple worship in Jerusalem, *the fields outside of Bethlehem became the place where a special group of shepherds raised the lambs that were sacrificed in the Temple. Being themselves under special Rabbinical care, they would strictly maintain a ceremonially clean stable for a birthing place. The Tower of the Flock was used for birthing ewes, and the surrounding fields were where these shepherds grazed their flocks.* These shepherds customarily kept their flocks outdoors twenty-four hours a day every day of the year, *but brought the ewes in to deliver their lambs where they could be carefully cared for. It was to this place that Joseph took Mary. It was in this special place at "Migdal Edar" that Christ was born! How do we know? Micah 4:8 tells us so!:*

*And you, O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come,  
the former dominion shall come, kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem.*

**Prophetically, "Migdal Edar"** is the exact place in Bethlehem for Christ to be born. *Micah was God's prophet* who was warning Israel of the coming captivity. *He used the authenticating prophecy of the Assyrian captivity of the Northern Kingdom (soon to occur when he foretold it) to serve as a reminder to Israel of God's promised Kingdom.* God wanted them to know that even though they would be taken from their land because of their disobedience that He would restore them in time. **Micah 4:7** establishes the context of the passage and clearly is a Messianic prophecy of the coming of the Millennial Kingdom when Jesus Christ will reign over Jerusalem forever. ". . . **LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even forever.**" In other words, God was assuring Israel that He would fulfill His promises to them of the Kingdom. In **Micah 4:8** the word is rendered "**tower of the flock**" (marg., "**Edar**"), and is used as a designation of Bethlehem, which figuratively represents the royal line of David as sprung from Bethlehem.

In this setting, **Micah (Micah 4:8)** uses the prophecy of the Babylonian captivity of the Southern Kingdom as a pledge to guarantee (authenticating prophecy) of the birth of Christ at "**Migdal Edar**" at Bethlehem which is exactly where it took place! **Micah prophesied that as surely as Assyrians would soon carry away Israel in the North, so the Messiah would come and establish His kingdom, the "first dominion, the kingdom shall come to Jerusalem."** *The verse states that as surely as Babylon would carry away the tribe of Judah, in the South, into captivity, so the Messiah would arrive at the Tower of the Flock. This prophecy was one other evidence that later proved that Jesus was the Messiah, but one that Israel ignored in rejecting Him as their Messiah.*

**Who were the shepherds who first received the news of the birth of the Messiah? Luke 2:8-18** records that there were shepherds in the fields keeping watch over their sheep by night. **Who then were these shepherds?** Without question these were shepherds who resided near Bethlehem. **They were none other but the shepherds from "Migdal Edar" who were well aware that the Targum** (a written Aramaic explanatory translations or paraphrasing of the Hebrew Scriptures) **hinted and many of the rabbis taught that Messiah might well be announced from "Migdal Edar" at Bethlehem. The angels only told the shepherds that they would find the Babe wrapped in "swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."** **There was no need for the angels to give these shepherds directions to the birthplace because they already knew. These were the men who raised sacrificial lambs that were sacrificed in the Temple. When the angelic announcement came, they knew exactly where to go, as Luke 2 indicates, for the sign of a manger could only mean their manger at the tower of the flock!** You cannot explain the meaning or direction of the sign they were given or their response unless you have the right manger and the right shepherds!

Typically, "**Migdal Edar**", (the tower of the flock) at Bethlehem is the perfect place for Christ to be born. **He was born in the very birthplace where tens of thousands of lambs, which had been sacrificed to prefigure Him. God promised it, pictured it, and performed it at "Migdal Edar". It all fits together, for that's the place where sacrificial lambs were born!** Jesus was *not* born behind an inn, in a smelly stable where the donkeys of travelers and other animals were kept. **He was born in Bethlehem, at the birthing place of the sacrificial lambs that were offered in the Temple in Jerusalem which Micah 4:8 calls the "tower of the flock."**

John the Baptist in **John 1:29** proclaimed of Jesus, "*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*" Jesus is presented in the Bible as being "in type" as a sacrificial lamb. It was not by chance but by choice that Christ identified His death with the time of the observance of the Passover. Peter spoke of our redemption as wrought by the "*precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*" (1 Pet. 1:19); and Paul told us that "*Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us*" (1 Cor. 5:7). Even the *first fulfilled type by which Christ is to be revealed in Heaven is as the Lamb (Rev. 5:6-13).*

The site has a long history as the place of the birth of Christ going back to Origen of Alexander in the 2nd Century who said that Jesus was born in a cave located in Bethlehem.

God's word tells us that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, of Judah in the city of David at a place called the "**tower of the flock.**"