

The “TRUE” Christmas Story:

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 3755. 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.

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.

Forty weeks¹ after His conception Jesus is born. It is Friday night, Elul 9, 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”. 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 travailed; for the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous than the sons of the married woman,” says the LORD.

On the following Sabbath, being the eighth day Jesus is circumcised. The Jewish people call this particular Sabbath, KiTavo, “When you enter”. On that day Jesus entered into the Mosaic Covenant 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 purification² from the blood of childbirth before presenting her son, Jesus at the Temple. It was Thursday, Ethanim³ 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 Tabernacles⁴ (Sukkoth).

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

¹ Forty weeks is the period of human gestation.

² Read Leviticus 12:1-4.

³ 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.

⁴ In Hebrew the feast is called Sukkoth, which is translated as tent, hut, tabernacle or booth and indicates a temporary dwelling.

The first theme is the **ingathering of various tree branches**. Jesus, “the **Branch**” spoken of by Isaiah the prophet⁵ 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.

The second theme of the feast is **God comes to tabernacle or dwell with His people**. For the past week, all the Jewish people had been living in temporary dwellings or booths made out of tree branches. It was 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**”⁶ 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 of Israel.

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Where was the Birthplace of the Lord Jesus?

Tradition, not the Bible, says that Jesus' birth place was in cave over which the Basilica of the Nativity was built in Bethlehem. Roman Emperor Constantine, built a Basilica_l 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** (Origen of Alexandria, "Against Celsus" in Volume 1, Chapter 51. "In regards to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, if anyone, after studying Micah's prophecy and the history recorded in the sacred writings by the disciples of Jesus. If needing to have additional sources of evidence, Let him be aware that the Scriptures are confirmed and the Gospel involving his birth, for there can be seen the cave located in Bethlehem where He was born and the manger where He was wrapped in swaddling-clothes. And this site is talked about with great interest in all the surrounding countries. Even among the enemies our faith it is being said that in this cave Jesus was born, the One who is worshiped and revered by the Christians.").

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 birth place as Bethlehem, “*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, 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

⁵ Isaiah 11:1-10
⁶ Exodus 3:14

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.

The popular conception that the word "manger" refers to a trough where animals were fed may be accurate. However, it could mean simply a stall. The Greek word which is translated in our English Bibles "manger" is *Yatnh phat-ne* (pronounced fat'-nay). The definition of the word is of a "stall" where animals are kept and in Luke 13:15 is translated as such. In the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) the word means a stall or a crib (See Proverbs 14:4). The question is what kind of "stall" or manger is the New Testament referring to and what kind of animal was fed or housed there.

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*" [mig-dawl ay-der] 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.**

Rabbi Short states, "According to Edersheim in *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah* (The Mishnah was the first recording of the oral law of the Jews or its Rabbinic Judaism. The word means "repetition" which means it was memorized material. It is the major source of rabbinic teachings of Judaism. Next to the Scriptures the Mishnah is the basic textbook of Jewish life and thought, and is traditionally considered to be an integral part of the Torah revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai.), in Book 2, Chapter 6, states, "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. A passage from the Mishnah (Shekelim 7:4) leads to the conclusion that *the flocks which pastured there were destined for Temple sacrifices.*" In addition, **Migdal Edar** is also mentioned by the Jewish Targums (The Targum is an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible (Tanak) which was written during Israel's seventy-year captivity in Babylon. Aramaic is one of the Semitic languages, an important group of languages known almost from the beginning of human history and including also Arabic, Hebrew, Ethiopic, and Akkadian (ancient Babylonian and Assyrian)) and is translated "**The Anointed One of the flock of Israel**".

Thus, Targum Yonatan, cited by Rabbi Munk, paraphrases Genesis 35:23 and Micah 4:8, "***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 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 birth place 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 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.

It is entirely possible that this cave or grotto was used to keep sheep and that this is where the tower of the flock was located, but it has not been proved. Others have purported the location of the "tower of the flock" in another location in the vicinity which has not been thoroughly excavated. The tower of the flock being a tower built of stones does not exist today and archaeology has not found its ruins. However, based on biblical record, **Micah 4:8**, and other evidences we must conclude that it was not the stable of an inn where donkeys and other animals were kept was not a tower.

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.**"

"But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, 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**

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<http://www.bible-truth.org/BirthPlaceofJesus.html#2>