

REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

**By
Otis Q. Sellers**

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ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

Mr. Sellers always focused on the Bible as his primary source of information in dealing with God's truths. His tape ministry was unprecedented. Instead of merely taping his radio ministry and selling the tapes, he would sit down at his desk in front of a microphone in his study and reason the Word of God out loud for his listeners. This method proved to have some drawbacks due to his health, interruptions, occasionally unclear notes, etc. The major benefit was to hear this wonder Bible teacher reason the scriptures out as though you were sitting in the study with him! The personal touch these tapes give to the ministry of Otis Q. Sellers, I believe is absolutely invaluable to the Bible student. You don't have to agree with him, he challenges you to do better. What a refreshing approach in a world full of "experts"!

Winston Brown has examined all the tape information he could find on the topic of Christmas as expounded by Mr. Sellers. All of us who have read and reread this document have come away with a better appreciation for the unfettered truth on the topic that has had so much secularism attached to it. Read and enjoy this wonderfully concise summary of Mr. Sellers' thoughts on this important topic.

Robert K. Brown, Jr.
Pastor, Grace Church

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Otis Q. Sellers' teaching on the Truth About Christmas is taken from his audiotapes labeled TL 97 and TL 228, concerning Matthew 1, and 2 and Luke 1, and 2. All tapes are available through The Word of Truth Ministry, in care of **Mrs. Gwen Staiger, 1121 Wood Oak Drive, Joshua, TX. 76058-1709**. Thanks and appreciation are in order to Ed Michellic and Robert K. Brown, Jr. and others for assistance with this pamphlet.

Most thanks are always due our Lord for His love in providing all our blessings, including His Word and the mother lode of knowledge it contains. Its riches always refresh those who seek its treasure.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Otis Q. Sellers provides an interesting commentary on the Bible chapters that record the events surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ. His collected oral statements are presented as if they are a single quotation. The King James Version verses are presented in **bold** type. The relevant verses have been placed in chronological order. The subheadings have been added by myself.

Winston P. Brown. November 2001. Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL

Otis Q. Sellers was born on March 25, 1901 in Wellston, Ohio. He attended the First Baptist Church there with his father. He became a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ at age 18. For the remaining years until his death in February 1992, his business in life was the study and proclamation of the Word of God. His original research and precise writing make him a seminal Christian author of the twentieth century. He is known for his view that the Kingdom of God will be a long period of divine activity preceding the second coming of Jesus Christ.

He attended Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois, earning his ministry certificate in 1922. He served as pastor for Baptist churches in Ohio and Kentucky. By 1932, his assiduous studies of the Bible led him away from rituals and ordinances such as baptism. He left the Baptist Church. He began writing pamphlets in 1935 in Illinois, and in 1945 he founded The Word of Truth Ministry in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which published the periodical **The Word of Truth (Magazine)**. He expanded his ministry booklets, radio broadcasts and the recording of more than five hundred messages on tape covering all the books in the Bible and many doctrinal issues. Twice each year he traveled across the country conducting Bible conferences in cities where his following had grown. In 1971 in Los Angeles, California, he began publishing four-page leaflets called **Seed and Bread**. At the time of his death, he had produced 196 of them, which have been compiled in two volumes (see www.seedandbread.org to begin your studies with The Word of Truth Ministry with these free messages).

As a student of God's written Word, Sellers came to his own conclusions after considering all Biblical material available and any other material that could shed light on the subject under consideration. He studied each word in order to bring forth its exact historical and grammatical meaning. His diligent, progressive study forced him at times to alter former beliefs. He asked that his readers take his latest writings to be his latest light. His successors in The Word of Truth Ministry continue the work of distributing his tapes and pamphlets, expanding upon the website, and continuing to build on the studies he started.

[Word of Truth Editors' Note: we still are studying the dispensational teachings of Mr. Sellers, and greatly appreciate the work of assembling this study on the REAL story of Christmas done by Grace Publications..

We know this material is not “child-like”, but are hopeful that sincere parents will study and read it to their children and grandchildren, so that they may know the truth surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ, and not just the stories made up by men.. And we again thank Grace Publications/Winston Brown for this excellent transcription. Dave Hettema/Bob Hammond, 10/2005]

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REFLECTIONS on the First Christmas

I. MATTHEW 1.

A. A Puzzling Pregnancy. (Matt. 1:18).

18. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: when as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

The Greek noun *gennao* is translated "birth" in v.18. It is translated "generation" elsewhere, and could be translated that here.

Mary was espoused to Joseph. The Jewish betrothal was a very solemn promise before witnesses, with no further marriage ceremony thereafter. It was customary after the betrothal that the man did not bring the woman to his own house right away. During that time they would have no relations. It was a custom of that time, not the law or a sin. God did not forbid it. It was not an engagement in any sense of the word. It was an equal to our marriage ceremony. It was simply a custom of that time. Don't mix it up and think of it as an engagement. This was a true husband and a true wife. There's no iniquity or sin involved here.

Mary was found with a child of the Holy Ghost before she and Joseph came together. The divine truth recorded here by Matthew is that Mary became pregnant prior to Joseph and Mary coming together. Matthew knows what a reader might be thinking. Not for an instant are we left with any doubt. Every unworthy thought that might come into the mind is completely forestalled. In this brief phrase, Matthew records what is popularly called "the virgin birth." It is a correct term. On this phrase hangs the entire paragraph, on this phrase hangs all else that the New Testament reports concerning the Word being made flesh.

Here are the choices: either the eternal God entered our race or He did not. It's just one thing or the other. If He did not, and Jesus was an ordinary human bastard, or if He was Joseph's natural son by an act of forbidden cohabitation, then they who will may call Him their Savior, but their fancy cannot raise Him from the mire into which they have cast Him. This is part of God's record concerning His Son. The Gospel of John reports that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. In the background material given here by Matthew, instead of in the Gospel of John, we have the record about how the Word was made flesh, how it came about. Joseph and Mary were betrothed. He had not yet brought her to his own home. Before they came together, before there had been any marriage relationship, or to put it in the plain language of today, before there had been any sexual relationship, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.

B. Joseph's Reflection. (Matt. 1:19).

19. Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.

The law was very strict in a case of this kind. Jewish law demanded that a woman be taken to the entrance of her father's house, with the men of the village stoning her until she was dead. You can read about this in Deuteronomy 22: 21.

Joseph intended to handle this matter concerning Mary privately. The Greek adverb translated "privily" means "secretly." What Joseph planned to act on was Deuteronomy 24:1, after a man married a woman, if he found any uncleanness with her, then he was to write out a bill of divorcement, hand it to her and send her on her way. These things were not matters of

public record. He thought on these things. He was not a rash, angry man, though he was mystified and puzzled. He didn't understand how this could have taken place with this woman who was so pure and still seemed to be so pure.

C. An Angelic Explanation. (Matt. 1:20-21).

20. But while he thought on these things, behold, an angel appeared to 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."

The messenger of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream. How did Joseph know that God was speaking to him in his dream? A divine principle of Bible study is applicable here which every believer would do well to adopt and adhere to. When God decides to communicate, He never fails to communicate, and the one to whom He communicates always knows that God is speaking. We do not live in a day when God is speaking to men outside of His Word, speaking to men in God's revelation. When today people are saying that "God spoke to me" or "God told me this," that's their own vain imagination. I don't buy one bit of it. If one buys a bit of it, one should buy it all. What a mess you'd be in if it were up to you to make the judgment as to who had a revelation from God and who didn't have a revelation from God. Once God sees fit to speak to a man, He never fails to communicate. You and I, being finite humans, sometimes seek to communicate but people may not understand us and not know what we said. They don't hear it correctly. It seems to go in one ear and out the other ear. But that was never true when God spoke. A Divine principle that should always be followed is: when God revealed Himself, He was *revealed*. When God spoke, men knew and understood what He said. Men accordingly were entirely responsible. Otherwise, God failed to communicate. Men may not act on His communications. They may reject His communications. After getting it, they might twist His communication, but that just simply added to their sin. The fact remains that when God speaks, He could not possibly speak and have anything imperfect about it,

so that God would fail to communicate. Joseph knew that God had spoken.

Mary was Joseph's wife. No doubt about it. Verse 16 tells us that Joseph was the husband of Mary. In verse 19 it tells us about Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man. The angel tells Joseph not to hesitate in taking Mary, your betrothed. What was generated in her was of the Holy Spirit. The Greek verb *gennao*, translated "conceived" or "begat" means "generated." Divine power acting at a distance caused this child to be generated in the womb of Mary.

The prophecy has the birth of a son, not just a child. Jesus was to be the name given to the new son. This was a familiar term from the Old Testament, *Joshuai*. It was not an uncommon name in Israel, but was instead well known. The interpretation of this is given, that He shall save His people from their sins. This child in the future would have a special relationship with Israel.

For in the great work that Jesus Christ did upon the cross of Calvary, He died for the world and the world will be saved, that world, system, order that God made. It is in such disorder today, so contrary to everything that was when God made it. It's going to be brought back to its original condition in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth. Christ also died for my sins. There was a special work for the people of Israel. He was going to save His people Israel from their sins.

D. A Prophecy Fulfilled. (Matt. 1:22-23).

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.' "

All this was done so that it might be fulfilled what was spoken by Isaiah, a prophet of the Lord. This was the final, definitive fulfillment of Isaiah's passage, Behold, a virgin shall be with child. No matter what the Old Testament word means, when it's quoted here, the Greek noun for virgin is used. And shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name "Emmanuel," which being interpreted is "God with us." That is the meaning of this title, which tells us of the essential nature and true character of the Lord Jesus Christ.

E. Joseph Arises and Obeys. (Matt. 1:24).

24. Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord bided him, and took unto him his wife, and knew her not until she had brought forth her first born son, that he called His name JESUS.

Any honest study of the Word between the first and second chapter of Matthew will understand that there is about a two-year passage of time. All one needs to do is to take all the facts that are recorded in Luke and Matthew.

II. LUKE 1.

A. Zechariah and Elisabeth. (Luke 1:5-7).

5. There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zechariah, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.

6. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

7. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.

Judea was the southern kingdom of what we call Palestine. There were so many priests that they could not all serve at the same time. The priesthood had twenty-four courses. This meant that every priest spent two weeks out of the year providing service at the temple. Zechariah was also of the family of Aaron, because it was a requirement to be a priest. Only those in the family of Aaron could be priests. They were Jews, of the family of Aaron, and both righteous before God. They walked blameless in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. It should not be said that no one could keep the law. Too many quote that verse, "If any man keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.» That is true. But here we have righteous Zechariah and Elisabeth walking blameless in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord.

Because they lived in Jerusalem in Palestine, living a short distance from the Temple, it was a simple matter for them to keep the law and to keep it blameless. Those that lived outside Palestine could not make the trip up to Jerusalem; it was impossible for them to keep the whole law. They were only required to keep that part of the law that was possible. God has never required the impossible of anyone. Zechariah and Elisabeth were deemed righteous before God. They had no children, which was a great tragedy in Israel. Elisabeth was barren and by this time both were well advanced in years. The archaic English term 'stricken' should be translated 'well advanced' in years to express our current way of thinking. It appeared that there would be no children in this family that they would die without heirs, without anyone to carry on for them.

B. The Angelic Promise to Zechariah. (Luke 1:8-17).

8. And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,

9. according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

10. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.

11. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

12. And when Zechariah saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

13. But the angel said unto him, "Fear not, Zechariah: for thy prayer is heard: and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

14. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.

15. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.

16. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.

17. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

We should not consider the Jewish people in Palestine at this time to be an ungodly people who cared not for Jehovah. They did care for Him. They were not a bad people, though there were a few among them that were. Here there were a lot of people praying at the time of incense.

An angel appears to Zechariah in the Temple area. No one was supposed to be in the Temple except Zechariah at this time, except for some other priests. Apparently Zechariah had prayed for a child. Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, which may be unuttered or unexpressed.

Specific instructions concerning the baby boy to be born are given, that he be named "John," and how he should be brought up. John is prophesied to be great in the sight of the Lord, not the same as in the sight of men. The phrase translated 'strong drink' means intoxicating drink. Perhaps the wine was not strong or intoxicating. This is not like our wines today, which don't require much to set people off.

It was known beforehand that John's ministry would not be a failure. Many of the sons of Israel would turn to the Lord their God because of John's work. The Greek word translated "children" here means "sons," not "children." This passage supports the belief that the overwhelming majority of the two and one-half million Jews in Palestine at this time had the spirit and power of Elijah. This verse is another one supporting the view that the majority of Jews in Palestine at this time did not reject or repudiate Christ Jesus, because John's time up to A.D. 33 did not reject or repudiate either the person or the message of the man Christ Jesus, but accepted all that they knew about Him.

These people cannot be charged with complicity in His rejection and His crucifixion. John would be the forerunner to the ministry of Christ Jesus, coming in the spirit and power of Elijah. Thus John the Baptist could perform the same ministry that Elijah later will perform, because ministry made ready a people prepared for the Lord. In witnessing for the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no greater joy or satisfaction than to come upon someone who is ready for the truth. There are those who are hard, sullen and argumentative as well. Sometimes a person's heart makes truth credible to them the very moment that they hear it. John was going out to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. John's ministry did not fail. They were prepared for the Lord. The common people heard him gladly.

C. Zechariah' Reply and Muteness. (Luke 2:18-24).

18. And Zechariah said unto the angel, "Whereby shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife well-stricken in years."

19. And the angel answering said unto him, "I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.

20. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season."

21. And the people waited for Zechariah, and marveled that he tarried so long in the temple.

22. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.

23. And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.

24. And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, "Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men."

Now Gabriel identifies himself, not earlier given in verse 11. Most angels' names are unknown to us, except Gabriel and Michael. The Greek verb translated 'sent' is *apostello*, which means commissioned with authority, not just sent from heaven to earth in a physical sense. I wrote a pamphlet titled, "**What Does *Apostello* Mean?**" because of its importance. See **Seed and Bread, Issue #5** (it is on our website). It is a good study to do because we will come across this word many times in our study of the Gospel of Luke. Gabriel was commissioned to speak unto Zechariah. Strictly speaking, that made Gabriel an apostle. He was God's apostle because he was *apostelloed*, to put it in an English form. *Apostello* means to commission with authority. It was limited. He was to speak unto Zechariah and show him these glad tidings. Because Zechariah doubted what Gabriel said, he was made dumb for a nine-month period, until Gabriel's words were fulfilled in their season.

The people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the Temple. They marveled that he was taking so long in the Temple. They may have thought that God would speak and Zechariah would come out with a message. But when Zechariah came out, he couldn't speak to them. They perceived that he had seen a vision in the Temple, which he had. He beckoned unto them, for them to come close to him. But he remained speechless. When the days of his administration were accomplished, Zechariah went to his own home in Judea, having completed his two weeks of service. After those days, his wife Elisabeth conceived. She hid herself five months, staying close to her house. This may have been to make sure. She said, "Thus hath the Lord dwelt with me when in those days He looked on me to take away my reproach among men."

D. The Angelic Annunciation to Mary. (Luke 1:26-38).

26. And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

27. to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

28. And the angel came in unto her, and said, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women."

29. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

30. And the angel said unto her, "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

31. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

32. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.

33. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

34. Then said Mary unto the angel, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?"

35. And the angel answered and said unto her, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

36. And behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

37. For with God nothing shall be impossible."

38. And Mary said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

In the sixth month of Elisabeth's pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to Mary. The Greek verb *apostello* is again used here. This is the second time that Gabriel is God's apostle. He had been God's apostle to Zechariah. Again God commissions Gabriel with authority. Galilee is what we would call the county; Nazareth is the village involved. The Greek noun translated "virgin" means that she had not known any man. The espousal among the Hebrews was equal to a marriage contract. Their customs were different from ours. The main difference was that he did not immediately bring this woman to his house where he lived. It took time to do that. The espousal was done first. Then he would tell her that the house is ready, and she would go with him there.

Joseph was of the house of David, a direct descendant of David. He had a right to be the king of Israel. The virgin's name was Mary. Gabriel told her that she was blessed "among" women, not above women. "Jesus" was another divinely given name for Christ. It was a common name in Israel. In Hebrew it is the name Joshua. Its Greek form would be Jesus. For example, the word "John" is different in many languages, and yet it's all basically the word "John." Mary's name was really "Miriam" in Hebrew. When her name is changed to Greek, it becomes "Mary." The term "Highest" is a designation for God. When you get the "Highest," you can't go any higher. Just like God is called "Heaven," because He is the over and above, so God is also called the "Highest."

The throne of David is the seat of government. As to whom He puts upon this throne that will be up to Him because this throne of David is given to Him. Some teachers like Herbert Armstrong think that the throne of David is an ornate chair. They have to find it somewhere, so they find it in the British coronation chair where kings and queens sit when they are crowned. They really are utterly childish in this. The word "throne" doesn't mean a chair however. It means a seat of government. King David had a seat of government. God here says that it will be given to the Lord Jesus

Christ. Christ has many thrones because he's King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This throne of His father David will be left to Him to dispose of.

Christ is going to reign over the house of Jacob in respect to the *aions*, not forever. The Greek words *aion* and *aions* refer to specific *flows* of Divine activity. The origin and uses of this word is traced in my pamphlet, "**What Does Aion Mean?**" See **Seed and Bread, Issue #128**. To reign is to govern, at least a form of the word 'govern.' These *aions* will be those that make up the kingdom *aions*. Of His kingdom, or government, there shall be no end. Kingdom here is government. It does not tell us that it will be as eternal as God. When the time comes wherever men go, they will never be out from under His government. When God assumes sovereignty, it isn't that He merely sets up a Jewish empire to rule the rest of the world. The kingdom of God is the kingdom of God, and of His kingdom there shall be no end. In my travels, I have come to the end of the United States' government many times, and then gone over into the Canadian government. There have been times that I have come to the end of the United States' government and gone over to the Mexican government. The United States government goes up to certain boundaries. If you go just over the boundary, you're out from under it. The time however will come when Christ's government shall have no end or boundary where you can step out of it.

E. Mary's Response. (Luke 1:38).

38. And Mary said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." And the angel departed from her.

Mary didn't understand how this could be since she had had no sexual relations with any man. Gabriel explains that the Holy Ghost, or the Holy Spirit, shall come upon her, and the power of the Highest (which is a name of God again) shall overshadow her. Her child to be born to her would be called the Son of God. When Mary comprehended this, she told Gabriel, Behold, the slave of the Lord. The Greek noun here translated "handmaiden" means "slave," which is a term almost of reproach. Be it unto me according to thy word. This is what is called submission. What a beautiful thing! That's what the Bible calls **repentance**. No matter what it means, Mary is willing to have it happen to her according to Gabriel's word.

F. Mary's Visit with Elizabeth. (Luke 1:39-45).

39. And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah;

40. and entered into the house of Zechariah, and saluted Elisabeth.

41. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.

42. And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

43. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

44. For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy."

45. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

The Greek word translated "blessed" here has the idea of exaltation in it, and as well as confirmation of great favor with God.

G. Mary's Song. (Luke 1:46-55).

46. And Mary said, "My soul doth magnify the Lord,

47. and my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Savior.

48. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

49. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.

50. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

51. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

52. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.

53. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.

54. He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever."

55. And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

God my Savior. What a beautiful statement! If God is our Savior, we are saved. What else do we need? We find our God in the Lord Jesus Christ. We need a savior, and if that Savior is any less than God, then we haven't got the complete Savior. We've got a bridge that will take us far, but will not cross the chasm to bring us to God. I trust you have had your Bible open while reading this. If not, read it again with an open Bible. There is so much in it that's important and helpful, that should all be learned carefully. This is the record of God giving His Son! This is where we find something to believe! In believing it, we have life through His name.

Starting in verse 46 is the Magnificat, the great hymn of praise of Mary that she spoke when she had the news that she was to be the mother of the Messiah. When she says, my soul doth magnify the Lord, she means Jehovah. The Greek noun here is *kurios*, but it can signify here no one else but Jehovah. My spirit has rejoiced in God, my Savior. That is God, who is my Savior. What she says in the first statement is repeated here the second statement. Jehovah is God. God is our Savior. Our Savior here is the Lord Jesus Christ. She further declares that He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden. Though "handmaiden" is a pretty word, what she actually said was He hath regarded the low estate of His slave. She was just a common person in Israel, one of the *fellahin*. Yet she is to be blessed among all women.

For, behold, for all generations shall henceforth call me blessed. They have so declared her! For despite of the over-exultation of Mary by the Roman Catholics, we still believe that Mary was the most blessed of women. The archaic English word "holpen" in verse 54 means "helped." One could say "supported" as a better translation of this word. To Abraham, and to his seed forever. Instead of forever, it is better translated for the *aion*, and that is in respect to His kingdom, or even in perpetuity. See page 8, where *aion* was previously discussed. Mary visited Elisabeth for about three months, and then returned to her own house.

H. The Birth of John the Baptist. (Luke 1:57-58).

57. Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.

58. And her neighbors and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.

The birth of a son was always a cause of rejoicing in the east. Sons were counted as the very crown of the marriage relation. This was especially so if it was the firstborn son. In the case of John the Baptist, this was greatly enhanced by the fact that his parents were old, with little hope of ever having a child. This caused great awe. Her family and friends came and rejoiced with Elisabeth.

I. The Naming of John. (Luke 1:59-66).

59. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zechariah, after the name of his father.

60. And his mother answered and said, "Not so; but he shall be called 'John.' "

61. And they said unto her, "There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name."

62. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.

63. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." And they marveled all.

64. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue bosed, and he spake, and praised God.

65. And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judea.

66. And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What manner of child shall this be!" And the hand of the Lord was with him.

The eighth day was the important day when the child was to be circumcised, a great event in Israel. Until then, according to Leviticus, the mother was considered unclean. On that day the relatives gathered for the

circumcision of the infant according to the law. This was the time when the child would be given his name. They automatically wanted to name the child "Zechariah," after the name of his father. His mother didn't want this, but wanted him called "John." This was probably based on her husband writing to her, since he could not speak. They said that there wasn't anyone of her kindred called by that name.

Relatives were getting into the picture to thwart the Divine will and instruction. This has often been seen in men's relationships with God, Whatever the relatives say is all-important. Many of them especially in-laws, want to dictate what a person's fate will be and what his belief will be. They made signs to the father, as to how he would have the child called that is how he would name the child, feeling that they would prevail. Zechariah asked for a writing tablet. He wrote, saying, "His name is John." They marveled because he said the same thing that Elisabeth had said. In Scripture, the word 'tongue' can mean the muscle in the mouth, the organ of articulate speech, or a language. Scripture has only these two meanings for it. Here it means the muscle of articulate speech. The fear was awe that came upon them all. They asked what manner of child this will be? What is the destiny of this child? What can this little boy be? What will this little boy become?

J. The Benediction of Zechariah. (Luke 1:67-80).

67. And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

68. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,

69. and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.

70. As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:

71. that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;

72. to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;

73. the oath which he swore to our father Abraham,

74. that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the

hand of our enemies might serve him without fear.

75. In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

76. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;

77. to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,

78. through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

79. to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

80. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the desert till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

With all due respect, when Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, he didn't roll on the floor, or become wild-eyed, or highly emotional. But he did speak the word of God-that's the meaning of 'prophesied.' He did speak of the future in connection with this, but he simply spoke the inspired word of God. He knew that this was the very beginning of the redemption of the people of Israel. This redemption will not have total fulfillment until the time comes that God assumes sovereignty, when the kingdom of God is a reality upon the earth. His holy prophets are from the *eon*, since the world began. The word *eon* is derived from the Greek *aion*, which was discussed on page 8. **It is not God's purpose to become the enemy of Israel, but to become the savior of Israel.** It is His purpose to be the deliverer of Israel, having delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, that they might serve Him in holiness and righteousness without restraint, without fear.

Zechariah mentioning "the prophet of the Highest" is referring to his firstborn son, John. "Called" here means designated or named. "Called" only means "invited" in about one-third of its occurrences. When we say that the President has named the Secretary of State that means that because he has named a certain person the Secretary of State, that he will fill that office. The ministry of John the Baptist is described here. He was in the desert until his "shewing" which means his indication to Israel, when Israel knew there was a prophet among them. It did not fail, even though John himself was put to death. His ministry did not fail. The child John grew, and waxed strong in spirit. The Lord who followed had an overwhelmingly successful ministry in the common people, who were the majority of people in Israel.

We leave John for the moment, going to the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

III.. LUKE 2.

A. The Bethlehem Journey. (Luke 2:1-5).

- 1. It came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be taxed.**
- 2. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)**
- 3. And all went to be taxed, every one to his own city.**
- 4. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)**
- 5. To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.**

The Greek noun for "world" here is *oikoumene*, which means "the inhabited earth." Right here is a most notable example of what is commonly called the overruling Providence of God. Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth. Holy Scripture required however that Christ be born in Bethlehem. How is this going to be accomplished or brought about? The Emperor Caesar Augustus never dreamed that his errant decree that everyone in the Roman Empire would be fulfilling the Word of God. Strictly speaking, it could be said that he had no right to make such a decree, and he had no right to enforce it since his dominions did not include the entire earth. Some of the earth was not his or under his control, such as what we nowadays call Ireland or Scotland. Some of the reaches of Germany, India and China weren't part of the Roman Empire either. But he liked to make out that he controlled the entire, inhabited earth, which he didn't. All went to be taxed in his or her own city. This taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.

Joseph also went up from the city of Nazareth in the province of Galilee into Judea unto the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David. He went there to be taxed with his espoused wife Mary. Note that Mary is designated as an "espoused wife,"

because once the espousal had taken place the woman was considered as being the man's wife. Mary was great with child.

B. The Bethlehem Birth. (Luke 2:6-7).

6. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

7. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

While they were at Bethlehem, it came that she was ready to deliver her child. She gave birth to her first-born son, whom she brought forth wrapped in swaddling clothes. The baby was laid in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. It would be nice to conceive this place as a stable where cows were kept such as when I was a boy. This oriental society did not however have such stables. The nearest they would have to it would be a cave. Nothing is mentioned here as to a cave or stable however.

This simple record does not need a lot of tinsel. It is often said that only God can make a tree, quoting a poet. Here in California men think that they can improve on the tree! The Christmas tree lots are painted white, red, brown and black with spray paint. The people put all kinds of ornaments upon them, with much tinsel, thinking it to be a very beautiful thing. It's really not as pretty as it was originally. For only God can make a tree, though man thinks that he can improve upon it.

God gave us this very simple record. In my day barns would have stalls, with a manger built at the front of a stall. Straw and other various things would be put down so that the cattle would be warmer at night. There's no such picture here. We shouldn't read into this the English or American countryside. The manger was a box to hold feed off the ground and out of the mud, so that it wasn't tramped underfoot. Most were made by taking two pieces of flat wood and making an "x." With two of these at the ends, and boards in between, a very suitable manger would be made.

After the Lord's birth, Mary wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and placed Him in a manger since there was no room in the inn. The inn was crowded with the great number of people so that there was no room. It was no great hardship. It was not the coldest time of the year. Intense suffering,

underprivileged or something like that, should not be made out of this. This was a matter of convenience. This was the way it took place.

C. The Angelic Announcement to the Shepherds. (Luke 2:8-14).

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.

There were shepherds abiding in the fields in the same country keeping watch over their flock by night. From the time of King David even to the present time, the country around Bethlehem has always had its hardy shepherds who guarded their flocks from wild beasts that infest deep ravines and gorges leading down to the Dead Sea on the east and the plains of Philistia on the west. Desert raiders and wild robbers would come to take the sheep, destroying the flock, even wilder than the animals that infested these ravines. They would build up a pen or what we in California would call a corral with stones wide at the base, narrow at the top, with a door. Good shepherds would block that door at night by sleeping in it. He would sleep at the door practically sitting up, pulling up his knees so he would fit in the door. "Keeping watch" does not mean that they were standing up. The sheep would be in the fold, with the shepherd blocking entrance through the door by wedging his body in the doorway. The shepherds were keeping watch over their flock by night.

An angel of the Lord came upon them. This messenger of the Lord, namely a messenger of Jehovah, stood by them. The glory of God shown round about them. They were very afraid. This was something they had never seen or experienced before. They were sore afraid.

10. And the angel said unto them, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

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

Notice that these good tidings were to be to all people. This was the result of God assuming sovereignty, and Israel taking her true and rightful place before God. This is a source of joy to all people. A Savior was born. This Savior was the Messiah, who is Jehovah, Christ the Lord.

13. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, saying,

14. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

These angels were not singing, but speaking, praising God with these express words. God's will toward men would be good, not one of indignation and wrath.

D. Shepherds Visit the Manager of Jesus. (Luke 2:15-20).

15. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, 'Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.'

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

The phrase let us now go even unto Bethlehem is a phrase that has intrigued me throughout my entire Christian life. I wrote a pamphlet on this subject, now out of print, reprinted in England and widely circulated there. I condensed it into a four-page leaflet, called "**Let Us Go Also**", which also has had a wide circulation. See Seed and Bread, Issue #22. We too can take this Scripture and make the journey to Bethlehem. In doing so we must be very careful not to pick up any traditions along the way. Let's go as true pilgrims. Watch what we pick up to keep from getting a muddled mind concerning the truth about Jesus' birth.

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 these things that were told them by the shepherds.

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.

Though they wondered about what was seen and said, they did not have the enlightenment to understand fully or appreciate it. They did not go to worship the babe. It was not intended for them to do that. Mary kept all these facts concerning His conception and birth in her heart. Only two people knew that the Lord Jesus Christ had been conceived by Divine miracle. Mary pondered them in her heart.

E. The Circumcision and Naming of Jesus. (Luke 2:21-24).

21. 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 turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

Now we face the question of whether Jesus Christ was a Christian. If you want the answer, you can get it starting here in verse 21. His name was **JESUS**, or **JOSHUA**.

They registered themselves in Bethlehem for the taxation, and likely paid the tax at that time. Now they brought the baby to Jerusalem to present him before the Lord. Our Lord was a Jewish Israelite. He was the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Everything was taken care of according to the law. He didn't come to destroy the law, but He came to fulfill it.

F. Simeon's Song. (Luke 2:25-35).

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,

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 marveled 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."

Now comes an amazing prophecy. This is the second time we find someone "just and devout." Zechariah and Elizabeth were the first just and devout ones. Do not think that the people of Israel were bad people at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ. They were confused and misled, sheep without a shepherd. Many of them were just and devout.

Simeon was waiting for and anticipating the consolation of Israel. This is a peculiar designation! The Greek noun *parakletos*, sometimes translated "comforter," here is translated "consolation." This word is very difficult to express in English. **'The Lord's Christ'** could be translated "the Messiah, even Jehovah," or it could better be translated "until you have seen the Anointed, that is Jehovah." What we have in these two names is the genitive of apposition, not an adjective and a noun, but two nouns.

Simeon came into the temple in Jerusalem at the very same moment that Joseph and Mary brought in the child *Jesus* following the custom of the law for Him. Simeon reached out and took this eight-day-old babe in his arms, blessing God. The word 'salvation' is a noun, but in the Greek it is an adjective. I wrote a leaflet on **"What Does *Soterion* Mean?"** See **Seed and Bread** **Issue #8**. It means "salvation-bringing." There is a law of Greek grammar: no adjective stands alone, but must qualify something

contained in the context. One needs to go back and find the qualifier. The reference is that Simeon would not die until after he saw the Lord's Messiah. He would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. He now says **"Mine eyes have seen thy salvation-bringing Messiah, which you have prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Nations, but the glory of thy people Israel.**

This shows the universal character of the Messiah. In no place is He only the Messiah of Israel. He is called "Messiah, the savior of the world" in one place. The Greek word "Messiah" does not particularly have to do with Israel, but it does have to do with the blessing of the world. This is the way it will be when God assumes sovereignty, when He enlightens the world. He will then be the light of all people.

G. The Adoration of Anna. (Luke 2:36-38).

36. And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; 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 fasting 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.

Anna was a prophetess who spoke the word of God. People could go to her to get God's Word concerning specific matters. If she had it, she could give it to them. She was a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher, one of the ten lost tribes, though it wasn't lost at this time. She was a widow of 84 years who stayed in the temple. She came and gave thanks unto the Lord. Her name was actually "Hannah," the same name as the mother of Samuel. The name means "gracious." She represents the remnant in Israel who were true to Jehovah, just as Simeon represents the remnant in Judah. It was quite rare for a widow to remain unmarried. That she was a celibate widow for such a long time reflects upon her spirituality and her great desire to serve God.

H. Return to Nazareth. (Luke 2:39).

39. And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.

The Luke narration follows Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. Now they go back to Nazareth from Jerusalem.

IV. MATTHEW 2.

There is about a two-year passage of time between the first and second chapter of Matthew. Take a look at the facts recorded in Luke and Matthew.

A. The Magi Meet King Herod in Jerusalem. (Matthew 2:1-9).

1. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

2. saying, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

3. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

4. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

5. And they said unto him, "In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

6. "And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

7. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

8. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also."

9. When they had heard the king, they departed;

The Greek adjective translated "wise" means wisdom in its highest sense, that wisdom which comes from above, both pure and peaceful. Of course these men were Gentiles. There is no doubt about that. I cannot say whether they were kings or not. People try to name them and make saints out of them. Men had turned to God throughout the Gentile world.

A strange star had appeared two years before the wise men arrived in Jerusalem. This star was a communication from God to them. This communication told them that a king had been born and that they should go and pay homage to Him. Their divine wisdom has them showing up in Jerusalem, asking where the newborn King of the Jews is, for they had seen His star in the east. They had come to worship Him. In this day one couldn't just phone the airline and get a reservation for Jerusalem. A trip like this with these important men took months of preparation. The caravan was exceedingly slow in moving. Twenty-five miles a day would be good travel distance. They saw the star in the east. They weren't following a star all the way to Jerusalem, as some would try to tell us to make this romantic.

King Herod was troubled when he heard these things. The importance of these visitors caused all Jerusalem to be troubled with him. Had something happened? Had something taken place that they had missed altogether? The king gathered all the scribes and the chief priest together. He demanded of them, "Where is Messiah to be born?" They replied, "In Bethlehem, Judea, for thus it was written by the prophet that there he was to be born." Nothing in the Scripture requires the Messiah to live in Bethlehem. His mother and so-called father were only visitors there overnight until they were registered for the poll taking. They likely got out of there in a couple of days to go back to their home in Nazareth.

Thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the princes of Judah, for out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule thy people Israel. There it is: Divine government. Out of Bethlehem was to come a governor who would rule the people of Israel. This was not the extent of His rule. He's going to govern the nations of the world. Emphatically this had to do with His people Israel.

Privately, Herod called the wise men into a closed session. He inquired of them diligently as to what time the star appeared. They didn't keep dates like we keep dates. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, directing them to go and search diligently for the young child, now no longer a babe. When they

had found Him, they were to bring word back to King Herod, so that he could come and worship Him also. After the wise men heard the king, they departed to go to Bethlehem.

B. The Magi Follow the Star to Nazareth. (Matthew 2:9-12).

9. Lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

10. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

11. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

12. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Lo! Behold! Surprisingly the star which they saw in the east two years before went before them until it came and stood over where the young child was in a **house in Nazareth where they lived**. I believe this with all my heart. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. It had the very same supernatural size that they had seen in the east. When they came to the house, it was not a stable. There were no cattle. **There wasn't any manger here**. Inside the house they saw the young child with Mary, His mother. They fell down and worshipped Him. When they had opened their treasure, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Gold is a great symbol of deity. The fragrance of frankincense gives him humanity. Myrrh was the embalming fluid of the east, which may have had to do with His death. This may be symbolic, but who can say what it means? Later they were warned in a dream that they shouldn't go back to Herod. They didn't go back to Jerusalem, but departed for their country in a different way.

But what happened to the kings that followed the star? That has nothing at all to do with the actual birth of Jesus Christ. Those men did not come to Bethlehem. They came to Jerusalem, but the Lord wasn't there. He was of Nazareth. When the record is traced out, they probably got to Nazareth two years later. The star appeared to them, gave its message and disappeared with the morning sun. When they got to Jerusalem, the king

told them to go to Bethlehem. The star then led them to Nazareth.

C. An Angelic Warning and Flight to Egypt. (Matthew 2:13-15).

13. And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

14. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

15. and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt have I called my son."

The first occurrence of the Greek verb *apollumi* is here, which means, "to destroy." Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him. Joseph took Mary and the young child into Egypt that night. They remained there until the death of Herod. This was in fulfillment of the prophecy, which said, "Out of Egypt have I called my son." This strange prophecy is found in Hosea 11: 1. Prophetic passages often have a latent, deeper meaning than that which first appears. Israel was called out of Egypt, and so also was our Lord Jesus Christ.

D. King Herod's Hunt and Slaughter. (Matthew 2:16-18).

16. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.

17. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,

18. "In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not."

King Herod became angry when he saw that the wise men had mocked him. The first occurrence in the New Testament of the Greek verb *apostello*) translated here "*sent forth*," is in verse 16. It means that Herod commissioned men to slay all the children in Bethlehem and in the coast cities who were two years old or younger. When it is a noun, it means "a commissioned one." The verb means "commissioned" if it deals with men. Notice that this was because of the time, which he was given when he diligently asked the wise men.

The last part of verse 16 should be linked with verse 7. He wants to get the child born at the earlier time so he has killed these children at this time of two years and under. This is commonly called "the slaughter of the innocents." It was a terrible thing, but let's not make it any worse than what it was. Demographers, who make a study of populations, reviewed the population records of Rome regarding the population of Bethlehem and the coastal cities at this time. They have decided that at the very most there would only be eight children up to the age of two years. There could be as few as three or four children killed, taking into consideration the number of people who lived there.

For example, if you have a population of one thousand in a small village, the census takers can tell you that you can expect to find so many people here of this age, that age, and so many babies, worked out in detail. The highest number of children killed was probably eight. This was a fulfillment of a prophecy by Jeremiah, which is at Jeremiah 31:15.

E. An Angel Appears to Joseph. (Matthew 2:19-21).

19. But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying,

20. "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life."

21. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

Joseph got this message in a dream.

F. Joseph's Return to Nazareth. (Matthew 2:22-23).

22. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God. in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee.

23. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

*****END OF SELECTED PORTIONS OF T APES *****