UNDERSTANDING THE ONE STORY OF SCRIPTURE

Week 11 – The Tower of the Flock

November 17, 2026

*In the fullness of the time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law… In the fullness of the time…* A timeframe had been set! God had been **setting the stage** for His Son's first coming. Every detail was in place for the incarnation ("in the flesh") – the birth of His Son – JESUS!

What led up to Jesus' entry into this world? There's a backstory to the Christmas account that God wants us to know. Jesus was born into CHAOS...because Jesus came to identify with us. Jesus was born into a dark and violent world! CAN WE RELATE?

When I know about the world into which Jesus was born, I can better understand the Gospels. The unfolding of God's plan of salvation becomes more clear. And we can MARVEL at what God is doing and continuing to do even today! AND, WE CAN STAND IN AWE OF GOD and say GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST!

Do we remember Zacharias…John the Baptizer's father – Zacharias, a Jewish priest serving God in the temple in Jerusalem? Zacharias' name means "Remembered by God!" After 430 years of "silence"…the time between the Hebrew Scriptures and the NT…when GOD DID NOT send even one prophet to WARN the Jewish people of discipline/of judgment if they did not turn to Him – THE SILENCE WAS BROKEN! And, after 430 years "of silence," the angel Gabriel was sent by God to tell Zacharias that he and his wife, Elizabeth…BOTH well advanced in years...and Elizabeth was BARREN…that they would have a SON – and they were to name this son, John. And, John would be the HERALD for the Messiah (Isa. 40:3)– the Messiah that the Jewish people were expecting – the Messiah Whom God had PROMISED to the Jewish people!! John would announce the Messiah Who would come as the ultimate sacrifice for sin...in God's plan for Israel and in God's plan for the WORLD!

Gabriel was sent to Zacharias who was <u>serving in the Temple in Jerusalem – at the time of SACRIFICE</u> – <u>when animals were being sacrificed…when LAMBS were being sacrificed!</u> (Lk. 1:8-9). We have a SACRIFICE theme laid out for us in SCRIPTURE at Jesus First Coming! A SACRIFICE theme at Christmas!! And the people marveled (Lk. 1:21; Lk. 1:63; Lk. 2:18).

We are so familiar with Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, aren't we? Joseph and Mary, both from King David's line, traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem…to be registered for the worldwide census decreed by the Romans. And Mary, Joseph's betrothed wife/his future wife, to whom he was engaged, was great with child! Difficult circumstances? **God-orchestrated circumstances**! This was a FULFILLMENT of the prophecy written in Isaiah 7:14, *...the virgin shall conceive and bear a son.* ("The" virgin – antecedent – Gen. 3:15) This worldwide census was decreed by Caesar Augustus who declared himself the Savior of the world!!! GOD used this pompous emperor to carry out **God's** plan. Mary and Joseph HAD to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem Ephrathah. WHY? It was **PROPHESIED in the Hebrew Scriptures!**



In Micah 5:2 – God said, *But you, Bethlehem **Ephrathah**, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting* – from eternity past. Jesus, the true Savior, the ONLY Savior of the world HAD to be born in Bethlehem EPHRATHAH!

Luke 2:8-12 - *Now there were in the same country* (in the area of Bethlehem) *shepherds* (Jewish shepherds) *living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them* (the shepherds)*, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to ALL people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior* (the Redeemer, the Deliverer)*, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be **the** sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.* What does this mean to us in Arizona in 2026? We need to know the backstory....

Firstly, why would an angel of the Lord appear to shepherds? Shepherds were the lowest of the low! These shepherds were under a ban decreed by the Rabbis! The shepherds were living in the fields w/ their flocks/their sheep - 24/7. Animals were sacrificed year-round. Lambs were sacrificed two times a day (Ex. 29:38-39). The shepherds could not obey the regulations in the Jewish Law re: washings and purification rites and dietary restrictions. The shepherds were looked down upon by the Rabbis and by the Jewish community. God's grace reaches down to the lowest of the low!

Where were the shepherds watching their flock? Luke 2:8 – in the "same country;" v. 4 – in the Bethlehem area. Where was Jesus born? Micah 5:2 - *But you,*

*Bethlehem Ephrathah*…. Jesus would come forth specifically from "Bethlehem Ephrathah"! There were two Bethlehem's in Israel...one in Galilee – 6 mi. NW of Nazareth (Josh. 19:10,15). And, the other Bethlehem...where Jesus was born–in Judea – close to JERUSALEM. Ephrathah was close to the Temple in Jerusalem!!! Sheep that were destined to be sacrificed in the Temple in Jerusalem HAD to be birthed, nurtured, and kept within a certain radius of the Temple in Jerusalem. Ephrathah was within that radius. This ruling was made by the Rabbis. BUT, it is GOD Who tells us in the Scripture, in Micah 5:2, that Jesus would come into the world in the part of Bethlehem known as Ephrathah where only sheep that were going to be sacrificed in the Temple were birthed, nurtured, and kept! This is the Christmas message! It is a message of SACRIFICE! Jesus came into the world…to die!

And, in Ephrathah there was a tower…the **Tower of the Flock** – specifically used to protect those sheep that would be sacrificed…keeping them from bruising until they were sacrificed (Deut. 15:21). Scripture tells us about the "Tower of the flock" in Gen. 35:21 and in Micah 4:8. In Gen. 35:21 we read that Jacob's wife, Rachel, gave birth to Benjamin (her second child)…at the location of the Tower of the Flock. And, in giving birth to Benjamin, Rachel died. Rachel's name in the Hebrew means "ewe" – a mama sheep. (Not a coincidence) A foreshadowing. Ewes – mama sheep – were brought to the Tower of the Flock to give birth to lambs that would be sacrificed. Because of Rachel's death in this area, Bethlehem became known as a place of sorrows. In Isa. 53, during Jesus' first coming, He was called a man of sorrows. Micah 4:8 mentions the



Tower of the Flock and tells us that the kingdom comes to the tower of the flock. What does that mean? Who will bring the Kingdom to this earth? The King of the Kingdom… JESUS! Could this Tower of the Flock be where Jesus was born? Perhaps Mary and Joseph traveled to this Tower of the Flock after they were told that there was no room at the inn (Luke 2:7).

Bible commentators and historians have speculated/guessed re: where Jesus was born. Some have suggested a stable as he was placed in a manger (a feeding trough for animals). But, Scripture doesn't tell us that He was born in a stable. Some have suggested that Jesus was born in a cave; Scripture doesn't tell us that He was born in a cave. Scripture doesn't specifically state that Jesus was born in the Tower of the Flock; however, Scripture points to that possibility from what we've already read in Scripture (Gen. 35:21/Micah 4:8 & Micah 5:2 [where Ephrathah is mentioned]).

Scripture tells us that Jesus was laid in a manger. There were mangers in this Tower of the Flock. The Tower of the Flock was well-known. It was part of the sacrificial system commanded by God. CONSIDER: if Mary did give birth to Jesus in this Tower of the Flock - where SACRIFICE was the FOCUS – what a MESSAGE God

was proclaiming to the people at the time AND to us today…HERE IS MY SON…the perfect Lamb of God Who will be sacrificed for sin.

The glory of the LORD shone around the shepherds. GLORY in Hebrew is *kavod* which means "weightiness" – GOD's GLORY is the visible manifestation of WHO GOD IS! Can you imagine how brightly the glory of God shone that night when the angel spoke to the Jewish shepherds who knew about the GLORY of God? And yet, many near Bethlehem Ephrathah - didn't see!!!!!

In Luke 2:10 we read that the angel spoke to the shepherds of "good tidings of great joy..." The Jewish people had been oppressed for about 900 years. The angel told the shepherds, "…there is BORN to you this day…in the City of David…" A SAVIOR Who is Messiah the Lord! The Savior – the One Who will be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah – and SAVE/bring SALVATION – is a very Jewish teaching.

Isa. 45:22 – *God told Israel, "Look to Me and be saved"*!

Isa. 64:5 –…*we have sinned and we need to be saved.*

The Hebrew word for *salvation*: Jesus' Hebrew name: YESHUA!

BUT BORN? The Messiah would be born? YES! Isa. 7:14 – *Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call His name Immanuel* (God with us; God in the flesh).

Isa. 9:6 – *Unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Then we have in the angel's message the mention of a SIGN. Luke 2:12 – The angel told the JEWISH shepherds, *this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.* HOW is that the sign? How are the shepherds going to find this special baby – this Savior – wrapped in swaddling cloths when ALL babies were wrapped this way at birth? Think OT/Hebrew Scriptures…the sacrifices had to be without BLEMISH! (couldn't be lame, blind, or have any serious defects [Dt. 15:21]).

Lambs born to ewes (mama lambs) in the place where the sacrificial lambs were birthed and kept (in the Tower of the Flock) – were wrapped in swaddling cloths. Animals being birthed are not mellow. They're kicking, flailing…and bruising

themselves. They would no longer be eligible for temple sacrifice. Lev. 22:27 - lambs, goats and bulls were eligible for sacrifice at 8 days old! To protect the sacrificial lambs from injury they were tightly cocooned in strips of cloth – they were swaddled. The swaddled lambs were then laid in a stone feeding trough, a manger, to contain them…to protect them from harm.

Luke 2:13-14 – *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men on whom God's sovereign pleasure rests.'* And then the angels departed.

Luke 2:15 – the shepherds said to one another, *Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.*

Did the angel tell the shepherds where to find the Baby? NO! Did the shepherds ask? NO! Mangers were in homes! The shepherds might have had to comb the entire city looking for this baby in a manger. BUT…they didn't…and they did indeed arrive at the right place… Luke 2:16 tells us that they came with HASTE and found Mary and Joseph and the Baby! These were no ordinary shepherds. These shepherds took care of the sacrificial lambs – at the Tower of the Flock. The account of the shepherds in Luke speaks to the Messiah Who came as the Lamb of God/the ultimate sacrifice. He's coming again! And, we are marveling as God is setting the stage for Jesus' Second Coming!

Possibly two years from the time of Jesus' birth we see the wise men, the Magi, visiting Jesus with a different "agenda". And, the wise men weren't Jewish – they were Gentiles. In Matt. 2:1-2 we read that the Gentile wise men saw the star when Jesus was born. It appears that the Magi saw the glory of God from where they lived in PERSIA. They traveled first to JERUSALEM (Matt. 2:1) – the city where the Messiah will reign as King at His Second coming. WHY did the Magi travel to Jerusalem? The Magi were NOT kings. The Magi were looking for a king! At Jerusalem the wise men encountered Herod whose scribes told them from Micah 5:2 - to go to Bethlehem in Ephrathah – and they did and…they found Jesus in a house – NOT lying in a manger (Matt. 2:11). AND, Jesus was a "Child," NOT a baby (Matt. 2:11).

These Gentile Magi (the text doesn't tell us how many) came to worship the King of the the Jews! How did these Gentile Magi know about the King of the Jews? The Jewish

prophet Daniel was appointed as the administrator of the Magi/the wise men by King Nebuchadnezzar about 600 years prior to Jesus' birth (Dan. 2:48). In the book of Daniel we find the exact time that the Jewish Messiah would come to Jerusalem as Messiah the Prince (Dan. 9:25) – as ROYALTY! Daniel's book is known as *the time of the Messiah*! Do you think Daniel might have told the Magi in his day about the coming Messiah…and they then passed that truth down to the Magi in future generations – to these Magi about which we read in Matthew 2?

The shepherds found Jesus as the LAMB of God Who would be sacrificed. When was Jesus sacrificed as the Lamb of God? At His first coming. The Magi were looking for a King. When does Jesus come as King? At His Second Coming.



And the Magi brought the child gifts depicting Who He is as Messiah:

<u>Gold</u> – representing royalty – this Child Who will be King.

<u>Frankincense</u> – which speaks of deity – frankincense was used on the altar of incense in front of the Holy of Holies where God dwelled - this Child is God.

<u>Myrrh</u> – used for embalming the dead – this Child will die and be laid in a tomb.

In the Christmas accounts in Luke and in Matthew we see God's entire plan of salvation. We so clearly see Jesus' two roles:

1) the Suffering Messiah/the LAMB of God dying for mankind

2) the Victorious King reigning on His throne in Jerusalem

Are we MARVELING at God's GLORIOUS plan?

GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST!!!

<u>SUGGESTED HOMEWORK</u>:
Pray about friends, relatives, and strangers with whom you can share Jesus through the account of The Tower of the Flock! May God use you mightily this Christmas for His glory!

THANK YOU for blessing me with your friendship and knowledge of Scripture!