

THE GLORY OF GOD

Week 11 – Tower of the Flock

November 19, 2024

In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law....

In the fullness of 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 – the birth of His Son – JESUS!

There's a backstory to the Christmas account that God wants us to know. The Roman Empire was ruling over and oppressing Israel. Knowing the world into which Jesus was born gives us a more clear understanding of God's plan of salvation. And, I stand in awe of God and shout, "GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST!"

Zacharias, a Jewish priest serving God in the temple in Jerusalem. Zacharias' name means "REMEMBERED BY GOD!" After 430 years of "silence"...between the OT and the NT – God did not send even one prophet to warn the Jewish people of discipline/of judgment if they did not turn to Him – if they did not REPENT. After 430 years – THE SILENCE WAS BROKEN!

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to tell Zacharias that he and his wife, both well advanced in years...and Elizabeth was barren...would have a son named John. John would be the herald for the Messiah...announcing Him as the ULTIMATE SACRIFICE for sin. Gabriel was sent to Zacharias in the Temple with this message...at the time of SACRIFICE!! We have a SACRIFICE theme laid out for us at Jesus' first coming!

The people in Judea were discussing all that was transpiring prior to Jesus' birth (Luke 1:21; Luke 1:63; Luke 2:18)...and they were MARVELING!

The Christmas accounts from Luke and from Matthew speak to Jesus' FIRST COMING and His SECOND COMING!! How familiar are we with those accounts?

Joseph and Mary, both from King David's line (Lk. 3 – Heli – father of Mary), 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, was with child! What difficult circumstances. What God-orchestrated circumstances! Caesar Augustus who decreed the worldwide census declared himself the savior of the world! How OF GOD to use this pagan emperor to carry out His plan of salvation for the world! Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem Ephrathah because...it was prophesied!

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*

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, 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, 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.*

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Why would an angel of the Lord appear to shepherds? Shepherds were the lowest of the low! And, they were the first who were told of Jesus birth. These shepherds were under a ban decreed by the Rabbis as they were living in the fields w/ their flocks 24/7. Animals were offered as sacrifices year-round. Lambs were sacrificed two times a day (Ex. 29:38-39) (and more at feasts days). The shepherds could not obey the regulations in the Jewish law re: washings and purification rites and food. God’s message: His grace reaches down to the lowest of the low...to everyone!

Why is Bethlehem Ephrathah specifically mentioned? There were two Bethlehem’s in Israel: 1) one in Galilee – 6 mi. NW of Nazareth (Josh. 19:10, 15); 2) the Bethlehem where Jesus was born was in Judea. Ephrathah was the northern part of the Bethlehem in Judea. Ephrathah was close to 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. This was the ruling in Jesus’ day This is the Christmas message! It is a message of SACRIFICE!

AND, in Ephrathah there was a tower...the Tower of the Flock – specifically used to protect those sheep that would be sacrificed. Alfred Edersheim’s book, “The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah,” records the writings of the Rabbis concerning the Tower of the Flock. Rabbis wrote, “The Tower of the Flock will be the place where the Messiah will be revealed.”

More importantly, Scripture tells us about the “Tower of the Flock” in Gen. 35:21 and in Micah 4:8.

Jacob's wife, Rachel, gave birth to Benjamin (second child) at the site of/the location of the Tower of the Flock. And, in giving birth to Benjamin, Rachel died. Rachel's name means "ewe" – a mama sheep. Not a coincidence...it's a foreshadowing. Ewes 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. Jesus was born in Bethlehem Ephrathah. At His first coming Jesus would suffer and die.

Could this be where Jesus was born? Perhaps Mary and Joseph traveled to the 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 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.

I'm suggesting that Jesus was born in this Tower of the Flock. 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 read in Scripture (Gen. 35:21/Micah 4:8). Scripture does tell us that Jesus was laid in a manger. There were mangers – feeding troughs - in this Tower of the Flock – for all the lambs that would be birthed, nurtured, and sacrificed.

Sacrifices were central to worship in the Temple in Jerusalem at that time; therefore, the Tower of the Flock was well-known. 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 world! We're told that He, Jesus, is a strong Tower (Prov. 18:10)!

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Luke 2:8-12 proclaims that the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds! The glory of God as seen by man, is God's manifested presence. We read of the glory of God departing from the temple in Jerusalem in the book of Ezekiel, chapters 8 through 11, because of the abominations in the Temple! HE'S BACK – the glory of God is back – Jesus, God the Son, entered this earth at His incarnation/His birth.

John 1:14 – *The Word was made flesh and dwelled (He tabernacle) among us and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten (unique one; not created) of the Father, full of grace and truth.*

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 didn't see!!

In Luke 2:10 we read that the angel spoke to the shepherds of "good tidings of great joy..." Isa. 41:27 – 700-800 years before Jesus' birth, Isaiah told the Jewish people that the Messiah will bring good tidings at His first coming! "I will give to you Israel One Who brings good tidings." And those good tidings of great joy would be to ALL people. God's plan of salvation is offered to the WORLD!

The angel told the shepherds, "...there is born to you this day...in the City of David..." – the ancient Bethlehem where King David was born a Savior Who is Messiah the Lord." The Jewish shepherds knew that the Messiah would be from the tribe of Judah – a descendant of King David (II Sam. 7 – the Davidic Covenant; Jer. 23:5; Psalms). The angel told the Jewish shepherds a SAVIOR would be born.

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

Isa. 64:5 – (You are indeed angry for) ...*we have sinned and we need to be saved.*

Do you know the Hebrew word for salvation? YESHUA!

Born? The Messiah would be born? YES!

Isa. 7:14 - *A 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. What is the sign?

Luke 2:12 – The angel told the JEWISH shepherds who are NOT ordinary shepherds...*to you shepherds who birth and watch over the sheep destined to be sacrificed...this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.*

In reading that verse, have we thought, "WELL, OF COURSE, that's THE sign!!!"

"That's the sign???"

"The angel said it was the sign."

"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! Lambs born to ewes (mama lambs) in the place where the sacrificial lambs were birthed and kept (in the Tower of the Flock)

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– were wrapped in swaddling cloths!! WHY? Animals coming into the world kick and bruise 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! After being wrapped in swaddling cloths, the animals would be laid in a manger to keep them contained while they were being examined for blemishes.

Luke 2:13-14 - *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 'Glory to God in the highest,*

And on earth peace toward men on whom God's sovereign pleasure rests. ' And then the angels departed.

Luke 2:15 – we read that 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.* ...which the Lord has made known to us! “To us” - the lowest of the low! God is indeed gracious!

Did the angel tell the shepherds where to find the Baby? NO! Did the shepherds ask? NO! How many mangers could there have been? A LOT! MANY of the homes in these towns had mangers. When people traveled during Jesus' time, they traveled with their livestock. There were no pet resorts! If you lived at that time and your relatives and friends visited, you accommodated them AND their animals!

Mangers could be as simple as a ledge protruding from the wall inside the house. Hay would be placed on that ledge – for the livestock. Mangers could be found in side-rooms in homes. And, oftentimes there were mangers in the “living rooms” in the main room of a home. Check out I Sam. 28:24. The Witch of EnDor had a fatted calf in her house.

Judges 11:31 – Jephthah, one of the Judges, had made a vow to God for deliverance... *Whatever comes out of the doors of my house...I will offer it up as a burnt offering.* He expected an animal to come out of his house – NOT his daughter.

Because animals were kept in homes, many mangers were in homes! The shepherds might've had to comb the entire city looking for this baby in a manger. BUT...I don't think they did – and they did indeed arrived at the right place. Luke 2:16 tells us that they came with HASTE and found Mary and Joseph and the Baby! I believe the shepherds knew exactly where to find the Babe as these were no ordinary shepherds. These shepherds took care of the sacrificial lambs at the Tower of the Flock. I'm suggesting that they found Him, Jesus Who is our strong tower (Prov. 18:10; Psalms 61:3; Psalm 144:2) in that watch tower in Bethlehem Ephrathah...in the Tower of the Flock! Jesus Who came first as the Suffering Servant, the ultimate sacrifice for sin, the perfect lamb of God, might very well have been birthed in 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 – Who came to die for our sins at His first coming. He's coming again, isn't He? Time has gone by...and we're waiting and marveling as God is setting the stage for Jesus Second Coming! Scripture speaks to a GAP of time between the Messiah's first coming and His second coming. We're looking for Jesus' any moment return...His imminent return.

Let's return to the Christmas account – but in the book of Matthew – where the Magi appear on the scene following a GAP of time – possibly two years from the time of Jesus' birth – two years from the shepherds' visit to find the infant Jesus. AND we see the wise men, the Magi, visiting

Jesus with a different “agenda”. The JEWISH shepherds found Him as a newborn lying in a manger (Luke 2:12, 16).

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. The Star (*kochav* - the blazing) – the GLORY OF GOD – that shone around the shepherds...the Magi saw the glory of God from where they lived in PERSIA. BUT, it took them time to travel across the desert from Persia to BETHLEHEM??????? NO!!!!!!!!!!!!!! They traveled first to JERUSALEM (Matt. 2:1) – the city where the Messiah will reign as King at His Second coming.

The Magi were looking for a king! At Jerusalem the wise men encountered Herod who told them from Micah 5:2 to go to Bethlehem. They did and they found Jesus in a house – NOT lying in a manger (Matt. 2:11). AND, He 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 JEWS!

While they were in Persia, the wise men had seen the GLORY OF GOD - the blazing start of the King. Herod was practically next door to Bethlehem – but he hadn’t seen the STAR – the GLORY OF GOD!

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.

The Magi were NOT kings. They were KING MAKERS – they LOOKED for Kings. At that time, history teaches that their king, the Persian king, was dethroned. And so, the Magi were looking for his replacement in Jerusalem. WHY Jerusalem? The Magi had heard from their ancestors through the Prophet Daniel that there would be ONE Who would be King of the Jews! The MESSIAH - JESUS! And in the book of Daniel we find the date that the Jewish Messiah would come to earth! Do you think the Jewish prophet Daniel would have shared that with the wise men in his day over which DANIEL was the Chief Administrator (Dan. 2:48)?

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

Gold – representing royalty – this Child Who will be King.

Frankincense – 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.

Myrrh – 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 – the Suffering Messiah, the LAMB of God, and the Conquering King. We see His two comings: His first coming to suffer and die; and His second coming to reign as King.

Are we MARVELING at God's AMAZING plan?

Are we fervently/excitedly anticipating His ANY MOMENT RETURN...

QUESTIONS: What was new to you? How did this lesson impact you? With who will you share it?

SUGGESTED HOMEWORK: Invite a Jewish person to the Chanukah/Christmas Celebration.

May God give you a MIGHTY Christmas for HIS GLORY!