

Lesson 52
Christmas
“Good Tidings of Great Joy”

The Christmas Story

According to Elder Bruce R. McConkie, the birth of Jesus is the third greatest miracle in all eternity, only to the Creation and the Atonement of Christ. (BYU Devotional 1975) Christ’s coming was foretold by the prophets and planned in the pre-mortal life. And Elohim said: “Whom shall I send? And one answered like unto the Son of Man: Here am I, send me.” (Abr 3:27)

ISAIAH 9:6 - For unto us a ^achild is ^bborn, unto us a ^cson is given: and the ^dgovernment shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, ^eCounsellor, The ^fmighty ^gGod, The ^heverlasting Father, The Prince of ⁱPeace.



ISAIAH 61:1 THE ^aSpirit of the Lord ^bGOD is upon me; because the LORD hath ^canointed me (Messiah means “anointed one.”) to ^dpreach ^egood tidings (that we can be delivered from sin and death.) unto the ^fmeek; he hath sent me to ^gbind up the brokenhearted, (the Lord will heal all emotional and spiritual wounds) to ^hproclaim ⁱliberty to the ^jcaptives, and the opening of the ^kprison to *them that are bound*; (Those in spirit prison will be set free. Christ quoted this scripture and said it had been fulfilled in him that day. Luke 4:16-21 And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture ^afulfilled in your ears.)



LUKE 3:4 As it is written in the book of the *prophet* Esaias; (Isaiah 40:3-5) and these are the words, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, (John the Baptist) Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight.

5 For behold, and lo, he shall come, as it is written in the book of the prophets, to take away the sins of the world, and to bring salvation unto the heathen nations, to gather together those who are lost, who are of the sheepfold of Israel;

6 Yea, even the dispersed and afflicted; and also to prepare the way, and make possible the preaching of the gospel unto the Gentiles;

7 And to be a light unto all who sit in darkness, unto the uttermost parts of the earth; to bring to pass the resurrection from the dead, and to ascend up on high, to dwell on the right hand of the Father,

8 Until the fulness of time, and the law and the testimony shall be sealed, and the keys of the kingdom shall be delivered up again unto the Father;

9 To administer justice unto all; to come down in judgment upon all, and to convince all the ungodly of their ungodly deeds, which they have committed; and all this in the day that he shall come;

10 For it is a day of power; yea, every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; (This part of Isaiah refers to the Second Coming.)

11 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. (John was claiming to be the promised forerunner of

time's meridian and Isaiah's quotation about the mountains being brought low and all flesh seeing the salvation of God, had reference not to the first but to the Second Coming of the Lord.)

John 1:1 ^aIN the ^bbeginning was the (gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the) Word, and the ^cWord was with (the Son), and the Son was with God, and the (Son) was (of) ^eGod. (Christ's pre-mortal position as God)

2 **The same was in the ^abeginning with God.** (In these first two verses, John wants to establish three things: 1) Jesus Christ was to be the outward and dynamic expression of both his Father's essence and his Father's will, 2) Jesus was eminently suited to this task, for he had developed the very same character and attributes as His Father, 3) The Father and the Son are two distinct persons.)

John 20: 31 But these are ^awritten, that ye might ^bbelieve that Jesus is the ^cChrist, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have ^dlife through his ^ename.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie said: "A God was coming to earth and everything connected with his birth and life and ministry and resurrection and ascension to eternal glory – everything! – must be perfect. It must conform to what the prophets have foreseen, foreknown, and foretold. Truly Omnipotent Wisdom had left nothing to chance. A God was coming into the world, and the world must be ready for his Advent." (The Mortal Messiah 1:284-85.)

LUKE 1:5 ¶ THERE was in the days of Herod, the king of (Judea) a certain priest named ^aZacharias, of the course of ^bAbia: (Abijah was the name of one of the 24 orders of priests organized under King David. When the Jews returned to Jerusalem prior to Jesus' birth, only 4 of the orders were represented. See 1 Chronicles 24:10.) and his wife (being) of the daughters of Aaron, and her name Elisabeth. (Both were descendants of Aaron.)

6 Were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ^aordinances of the Lord blameless. (There were many priests in Israel, literal descendants of Aaron. Elder McConkie estimates between 20,000 and 24,000.)

7 And they had no child, Elisabeth was ^abarren, and they (were) both well ^bstricken in years. (How can we keep hope when we pray for something that does not happen?)

8 And while he executed the ^apriest's office before God in the order of his (priesthood),

9 According to the (law), his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. (The honor of officiating in the temple seldom fell to the same person twice in a lifetime.)

10 The whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. (Not all Israel was in a state of apostasy. There were many righteous, including Elizabeth and Zacharias.)

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

12 And when Zacharias saw (the angel) he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

13 But the angel said unto him, ^aFear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; (Zacharias had prayed that Elisabeth would have a child.) and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a ^bson, and thou shalt call his name John. (John means Jehovah is gracious.)

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

26 **And in the sixth month the ^aangel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, (Hebrews prayed 3 times a day, and it was probably at one of these times that the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary.)**

27 **To a ^avirgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph,** (An espousal was the beginning of a marriage, although they weren't living together as man and wife, yet and it could only be broken by divorcement. The penalty for adultery was stoning or divorcement which would result in her being a scourge and the child illegitimate. The predicament would result in scandal.) **of the house of David;**

and the virgin's name was Mary. (WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT MARY? WHAT WAS MARY'S NAME IN HEBREW? Mary's parents were Anna & Jehoakim (McConkie says Jacob). They were wealthy. Anna had trouble having a child and promised the Lord that if he would bless her with a child, she would dedicate that child to the Lord. When the child was born they named her Miriam (Mary). After weaning the child, at about age 3, they took her to the temple to live and be reared by the priests. Such a child was called the candlestick of the Lord. Mary would serve in the temple the spring (Passover) and fall (Feast of Tabernacles) of the year and spend her summers in Nazareth. Several years later her parents died and she inherited everything that was theirs. Hebrew custom was that a girl would be engaged at age 13, 14 and sometimes 15. A man between the ages of 19-21. Bruce R. McConkie said: "As there is only one Christ, so there is only one Mary. And as the Father chose the most noble and righteous of all his spirit sons to come into mortality as his Only Begotten in the flesh, so we may confidently conclude that he selected the most worthy and spiritually talented of all his spirit daughters to be the mortal mother of his Eternal Son." (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*. 3 vols. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965-73, 1:85.))

28 And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, *thou* (virgin) (who) art highly favored (of the Lord), the Lord is with thee: (for thou art chosen and) blessed among ^awomen.

29 (WHY WAS MARY TROUBLED?) And when she saw (the angel), she was troubled at his saying, and (pondered) in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. (Mary was troubled at the salutation of the angel. It was a salutation to the elite. He addressed her as an equal which thing was not done by a Hebrew male, let alone an angel.)

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

31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive, and bring forth a son, and (shall) call his name ^aJESUS.

32 He shall be great, and shall be called the ^aSon of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the ^bthrone of his father ^cDavid: (Jesus was heir to the throne of David.)

33 And he shall ^areign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no ^bend.

34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How (can) this be?

35 And the angel answered and said unto her, (Of the Holy Ghost, and the power of the Highest): Therefore also that holy (child that) shall be born of thee shall be called the ^bSon of God.

36 And, behold, thy ^acousin Elisabeth (HOW WERE MARY AND ELIZABETH RELATED?

Mary was of the tribe of Judah and Elisabeth of Levi. This should be translated as relative), she hath also conceived a son in her ^bold age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. (WHY DID THE ANGEL TELL MARY ABOUT ELIZABETH'S SITUATION? This was counsel to Mary to go and receive comfort and help from her cousin. The inference is that Mary's mother was dead, and that Elisabeth could speak peace to the young virgin's heart as no other mortal could. Mortal Messiah, p. 319

37 For with God nothing (can) be ^aimpossible.

38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. (Mary was humble and submissive.) And the angel departed from her. (How old was Mary? About 15 years old. Mortal Messiah 1:322)

39 And in those days, (Mary) went into the hill country with haste (She probably told Joseph before seeking out the only two people who would believe and understand her position, her relatives Elisabeth and Zachariah. The Greek reads relative and not cousin. Mary is of the tribe of Judah and both Elisabeth and Zachariah are of Levi through Aaron.), into a city of Juda; (HOW FAR DID MARY TRAVEL TO BE WITH ELIZABETH? Zacharias and Elisabeth may have lived in Hebron, south of Jerusalem, where also Abraham and Sarah lived (Gen 13:18). Hebron was a Levitical city. (Mortal Messiah, p. 311) or Jutta, about 100 miles away from Nazareth. Jesus the Christ, p. 78, Mary would have walked the distance with a sister and brother and other family members. She would not have gone alone, camping out and facing the ever present danger of

thieves and robbers. Mortal Messiah, p. 323)

40 And entered into the house of Zacharias, and ^asaluted Elisabeth.

41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; (Back in verse 15, Gabriel promised that John would have the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb. According to Elder McConckie: "The spirit enters the body at the time of quickening, months prior to the actual normal birth. MD, p. 768) and Elisabeth was ^afilled with the Holy Ghost:

42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed *art* thou among ^awomen, and blessed *is* the fruit of thy womb. (We may confidently conclude that he selected the most worthy and spiritually talented of all his spirit daughters to be the mortal mother of his Eternal Son. DNTC, p. 85)

56 And Mary abode with (Elizab^eth) about three months, and returned to her own house. (WHAT HAPPENED WHILE MARY WAS STAYING WITH ELIZABETH? Until the birth of John. Mary may have stayed until John's birth and then returned home. Mary inherited everything from her parents who had died. In those times, a woman who had a close male relative would not have her own house. It would be said she returned to her father's house, etc.)

Matthew 1:18 ¶ ^aNow (as it is written) the ^bbirth of Jesus Christ was ^con this wise: (After) his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, (they were not married, but promised to each other) before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. (This should read, by the power of the Holy Ghost. DNTC, p. 82. Alma 7:19 says: Christ shall be born of Mary...she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God. 1 Nephi 11: 13 And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the great city of Jerusalem, and also other cities. And I beheld the city of Nazareth; and in the city of ^aNazareth I beheld a ^bvirgin, and she was exceedingly fair and white. 14 And it came to pass that I saw the ^aheavens open; and an angel came down and stood before me; and he said unto me: Nephi, what beholdest thou? 15 And I said unto him: A virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins. 16 And he said unto me: Knowest thou the ^acondescension of God? 17 And I said unto him: I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things. 18 And he said unto me: Behold, the ^avirgin whom thou seest is the ^bmother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh. 19 And it came to pass that I beheld that she was carried away in the Spirit; and after she had been carried away in the ^aSpirit for the space of a time the angel spake unto me, saying: Look! 20 And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a ^achild in her arms. 21 And the angel said unto me: Behold the ^aLamb of God, yea, even the ^bSon of the Eternal ^cFather! Knowest thou the meaning of the ^dtree which thy father saw? During the espousal period, the bride-elect lived with her family or friends, and all communication between herself and her promised husband was carried on through a friend.) 19 (DID JOSEPH BELIEVE MARY'S STORY?) Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a publick ^aexample, was ^bminded to ^cput her away privily. (He could have had her brought before a public trial at which she could have been sentenced to death. Deut 22:20-21. He chose the most merciful way of dealing with the situation. He was truly a kind and gentle and forgiving man. Joseph did not believe Mary, because he was going to divorce her. Elder McConckie said: "We may well suppose that Mary told Joseph of her condition; that she then went to Elizabeth; that Joseph struggled with his problem for nearly three months, being fully tested; that Gabriel brought the word; that Joseph sent word to Mary of his conversion; that she returned again in haste and joy; that immediately the second part of the marriage ceremony was performed; and that Joseph, to preserve the virginity of the one who bore God's Child, refrained from sexual association with her until after Jesus came forth as her child. Mortal Messiah 1:333) 20 But while he thought on these things (Joseph wrestled with this problem. The Greek word translated as "thought" more properly conveys "agonized." He had decided to divorce her in

private when the angel gave him instructions.), behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a (vision) saying, Joseph, thou son of ^bDavid, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: (espoused persons were considered married.) for that which is conceived in her is of the ^cHoly Ghost. (After Joseph was tested, the angel appeared to him.)

21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his ^aname ^bJESUS (WHAT IS JESUS' NAME? Russell M. Nelson said at a BYU Devotional in 2002, December 10: Mary and Joseph did not need to be taught the deep significance of the name *Jesus*. The Hebrew root from which it was derived, *Jehoshua*, means "Jehovah is salvation." So the mission of Jehovah, soon to be named Jesus, was salvation, and His supreme destiny was to become the Savior of the world.): for he shall ^csave his people from their sins.

22 Now all this (took place), that (all things) might be fulfilled which (were) spoken of the Lord by the prophet(s), saying,

23 ^aBehold, a ^bvirgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his ^cname ^dEmmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

24 Then Joseph (awaking out of his vision) did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his ^awife: (WHY WAS IT IMPORTANT THAT JOSEPH MARRY MARY BEFORE THE BIRTH OF JESUS? They finished the marriage ceremony. By promptly taking Mary as his wife, under Jewish law he was acknowledging the child as his own, therefore there was no need for adoption because Jesus became the legal, legitimate son of Joseph.)

25 And knew her not (until) she had brought forth her ^afirstborn son: and (they) called his name JESUS.

Luke 2:1 AND it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all (his empire) should be ^btaxed.

2 (And this ^ataxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. (James E. Talmage said: "This census was the 2nd of 3 such general registrations recorded by historians as occurring at intervals of about 20 years." Jesus the Christ, p. 86. Elder Russell M. Nelson at a BYU Devotional in 2002, December 10, said: This was really a capitation tax, a census, an enrollment--a registration of the citizenry of the empire of Rome. Herod made a decision that people should be counted in the land of their ancestors. Mary and Joseph, then living in Nazareth, had to travel southward to the city of David, a distance approximately as far as from Salt Lake City to Nephi. Perhaps they traveled even farther if they went around the hostile intermediate province of Samaria. Almost certainly they traveled with relatives who likewise were summoned to the land of their ancestry. This difficult travel was no doubt made with their animals, such as dogs and donkeys. They likely camped out several nights, as three to four days (it could have been as long as ten days) would have been required for that journey. Although the tax did not require people to go to the place of their family origin, the Jews preferred it. Hence, Joseph and Mary both went back to the city of David, Bethlehem for the census. Women were not required to go, as they didn't participate. Mary probably went because she wanted Joseph's support as he knew who the child truly was and facing a difficult journey was preferred to the still lingering scandal in Nazareth. It was a difficult, treacherous journey by donkey.)

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, (Nazareth was in the north, but at a lower elevation than Bethlehem, hence they went up to Bethlehem. Nazareth was about 1,800 feet and Bethlehem was about 2,500 feet above sea level.) out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called ^aBethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) (This was a trip of about 80 or 90 miles. It may have taken between 7 to 10 days to make the trip. Elder Bruce R. McConkie said: "They went to Bethlehem because they had no choice. But this was only the occasion, the vehicle, the excuse, as it were. They would have moved heaven and earth, if need be,

to place themselves in the City of David when the hour arrived for the coming of the Son of David. Mortal Messiah, 1:341 WHAT DOES BETHLEHEM MEAN? House of Bread. The Bread of Life was coming into the world.)

5 To be taxed with Mary his ^aespoused wife, (she) being great with child.

Meanwhile on the American continent:

3 Nephi 1: 4 And it came to pass that in the commencement of the ninety and second year, behold, the prophecies of the prophets began to be fulfilled more fully; for there began to be ^agreater signs and greater miracles wrought among the people.

5 But there were some who began to say that the time was past for the words to be fulfilled, which were ^aspoken by Samuel, the Lamanite.

6 And they began to ^arejoice over their brethren, saying: Behold the time is past, and the words of Samuel are not fulfilled; therefore, your joy and your faith concerning this thing hath been vain.

7 And it came to pass that they did make a great uproar throughout the land; and the people who believed began to be very sorrowful, lest by any means those things which had been spoken might not come to pass.

8 But behold, they did watch steadfastly for ^athat day and that night and that day which should be as one day as if there were no night, that they might know that their faith had not been vain.

9 Now it came to pass that there was a day set apart by the ^aunbelievers, that all those who believed in those traditions should be ^bput to death except the ^csign should come to pass, which had been given by Samuel the prophet.

10 Now it came to pass that when Nephi, the son of Nephi, saw this wickedness of his people, his heart was exceedingly sorrowful.

11 And it came to pass that he went out and bowed himself down upon the earth, and cried mightily to his God in behalf of his people, yea, those who were about to be destroyed because of their faith in the tradition of their fathers.

12 And it came to pass that he cried mightily unto the Lord ^aall that day; and behold, the ^bvoice of the Lord came unto him, saying:

13 Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the ^asign be given, and on the ^bmorrow come I into the world, to show unto the world that I will fulfil all that which I have caused to be ^cspoken by the mouth of my holy prophets.

14 Behold, I ^acome unto my own, to ^bfulfil all things which I have made known unto the children of men from the ^cfoundation of the world, and to do the ^dwill, ^eboth ^fof the Father and of the Son—of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh. And behold, the time is at hand, and this night shall the sign be given.



Luke 2:6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. (HOW LONG AFTER THEY ARRIVED IN BETHLEHEM WAS JESUS BORN? “We are not told how soon the birth occurred after the arrival of Mary and her husband at Bethlehem. Jesus the Christ, p. 87. The scriptures make it sound like as soon as they arrived in Bethlehem she gave birth. She was probably there a few days or weeks, which would have given people there time to help her out with the birth.) 7 And she brought forth her ³firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was (none to give) room for them in the ^binn(s). (WHY WAS THERE NO ROOM IN THE INNS? Most of the visitors to Bethlehem would have been men. Also, the men appear to be uncaring of Mary’s situation to give her room. The word inn should be translated guestchamber. (Mortal Messiah, p. 350) Others believe

this means that the guest room was already occupied. Arrangements were made for Mary to give birth in another part of the house, presumably the “family room”. Mary and Joseph had returned to Bethlehem to register for the Roman tax because it was the homeland of their families... With many relatives living in Bethlehem, it would have been unthinkable for Mary and Joseph to seek a public inn, if indeed one existed there. In that small village, family members would not have expected or accepted such a rejection of their hospitality especially in view of the imminent birth of a firstborn child. (Kenneth Bailey, The Manger and the Inn, 4:2 Elder Russell M. Nelson at a BYU Devotional in 2002, December 10: Let's pause to ponder this verse. We need to be aware of the culture of that time and region, and we need to learn one word from the original Greek text. In the Greek New Testament, the root from which *inn* was translated is *kataluma*. We don't have an equivalent word in the English language. The Greek prefix *kata-* (or *cata-*) means "a bringing down." We see it in English words such as *catabolism*, *catastrophe*, and *cataclysm*. When the prefix *kata-* was joined with the suffix *-luma*, it meant literally "a breaking down of a journey." A *kataluma* was a guest chamber in a lodging place. In those days an inn was not like a Holiday Inn or a Bethlehem Marriott. A lodging place in that part of Asia had to provide accommodations for traveling caravans, including the people and their animals. Caravans stayed at what was then known (and is still known) as a *caravansary*, or a *khan*. You may look in your own dictionary and find *caravansary* and *khan*, each defined as a rest house in some Asian countries. Such a facility is typically rectangular in shape. It has a central courtyard for the animals that is surrounded by walled cubicles where the people rest. These quarters allowed guests to be elevated slightly above their animals with open doorways so that owners could watch over their animals. The Joseph Smith Translation of Luke 2:7 indicates that there was no room for them in the "inns," suggesting that all of the *katalumas* or cubicles of the caravansary were occupied. In the Greek New Testament the word *kataluma* appears in only two other passages, translated in each instance not as "inn" but as a "guestchamber," which fits the concept that we have discussed. As a youngster, whenever I heard those words "no room in the inn," I assumed that No Vacancy signs were posted at local motels or that the innkeepers were inhospitable or even hostile. Such an assumption is probably way off the mark. People of that part of the world were no doubt then as they are now--most hospitable. Particularly would this have been true at a season when the normal population of Jerusalem and neighboring Bethlehem would be swollen with large numbers of relatives. At a caravansary, animals were secured for the night in the center courtyard. In that courtyard there would have been donkeys and dogs, sheep, and possibly camels and oxen, along with all of the animals' discharges and odors. Because the guest chambers surrounding the courtyard were filled,

Joseph possibly made the decision to care for Mary's delivery in the center courtyard of a caravansary--among the animals. There, in that lowly circumstance, the Lamb of God was born. Everyone took strangers into their homes, fed them, washed their feet, and cared for their beasts of burden. They arrived late in the day otherwise there would have been a place for them. This was not an "inn", but a kahn or place of lodgment for strangers or caravaners lodged for the night. It may have been a large, bare building, built of rough stones, surrounding an open court in which animals could be tied up for the night. These rooms are public and without furniture. A traveler would also have to bring his own food, attend to his own animals, and draw water from a nearby spring. In the area of Bethlehem, sometimes the whole kahn, sometimes only a portion where the animals were kept, was located within a large cave, of which there are many in the area. Mortal Messiah, p. 345-346 Bible scholars not of our faith have said that the shelter within which Jesus was born was that of one of the numerous limestone caves which abound in the region, and which are still used by travelers as resting places. Jesus the Christ, p. 100 Elder Talmage said: "We cannot reasonably regard this circumstance as evidence of extreme destitution; doubtless it entailed inconvenience, but it gives us no assurance of great distress or suffering." Jesus the Christ, p. 87. The inn at Bethlehem was the original home of Boaz. It came by inheritance to David, who built a fortress there. It was then sold and became an inn, but by Jewish law after 50 years, property sold reverts to the original family. Therefore, Joseph owned the inn in Bethlehem. Joseph and Mary were not poor. They were of royal blood and owned much property in Bethlehem and Nazareth, however they may have been land rich and cash poor. There were two types of inns in those days; ones with innkeepers and those without. This inn was without an innkeeper. There were no separate rooms, only four walls and a roof. The lower section of the inn was for the traveler's animals. The cave nearby the inn was sometimes used for overflow for the animals. It could be made clean with fresh straw and offered some privacy. This was the cave where David was anointed King of Israel generations earlier. By Jewish custom, a child born in an inn belonged to all those in the inn and they were to provide gifts for that child. A child born in a palace belonged to the kingdom. A child born in a stable belonged to everyone.)

There is much debate as to the actual date of the birth of Jesus. Elder Talmage said: "We believe that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea, April 6, BC1. Jesus the Christ, p. 98 He was born at Passover, or the first full moon after the first day of spring. April 6, 1830 was also the first full moon after the first day of spring. It was also Passover. What is a manger? What did it look like? In Palestine animals were fed in stone troughs. Even the resting place of the infant Jesus was symbolic. The Rock of Israel laid in a stone crib.)

3 Nephi 1:15 And it came to pass that the words which came unto Nephi were fulfilled, according as they had been spoken; for behold, at the going down of the ^asun there was ^bno darkness; and the people began to be astonished because there was no darkness when the night came.

Luke 2:8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **(WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE SHEPHERDS?)** These were not ordinary shepherds, but those watching over the sheep destined for sacrifice



on the great altar in the Lord's House. There were many shepherds in Palestine, but only to those who watched over the temple flocks did the herald angel come; only they heard the heavenly choir. Mortal Messiah, p. 347.)



9 And, lo, (an) angel of the Lord (appeared unto) them, and the ^aglory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 (But) the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you ^agood tidings of great ^bjoy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is ^aborn this day in the city of David a ^bSaviour, (who) is Christ the ^cLord.

12 (And this is the way) Ye shall find the babe (he is) wrapped in swaddling clothes, (and is) lying in a manger. **(WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SWADDLING CLOTHES?)** The swaddling clothes and the manger were not a sign, which would identify Jesus; the angel was merely describing where he was and how he was dressed. DNTC, p. 97. Elder Russell M. Nelson said: Why was reference made twice in Luke 2 to His being wrapped in swaddling clothes? What is the meaning of those five words "wrapped him in swaddling clothes"? I sense a significance beyond the use of an ordinary diaper and receiving blanket. Instead of those five words in the English text, only one word is needed in the Greek New Testament. That word is *sparganoō*, which means to envelop a newborn child with special cloth, strips of which were passed from side to side. The cloth would probably bear unique family identification. That procedure was especially applicable to the birth of a firstborn son. His wrappings surely would have been distinctive. I think that such a concept of a cloth with family markings might also have been relevant when Joseph, son of Israel, became the birthright son and received the unique cloth coat of many colors - a fabric symbolic of the birthright. All babies were wrapped in swaddling clothes, and many were lain in a manger. In Bethlehem at the time there were about 300 people and would have been about 20 babies in swaddling clothes. How were the shepherds going to be able to tell which baby was the One spoken of by the angels? Mary wore a royal blue outer cloak signifying her royal blood. She laid this upon the straw in the manger. Over this went her white mantle with the golden candlestick embroidered upon it, signifying that she had been dedicated to the Lord - a candlestick of the Lord. The child was laid directly upon this. He had been carefully wrapped in special, symbolic swaddling clothes. First, as Jewish custom dictated and good mothers adhered to, the child would have a strip of blue and white cloth with his royal genealogy embroidered in silver, signifying a son of royal birth. The second strip would also be blue and white with the paternal genealogy embroidered in silver. The third strip would be red, signifying the blood of Moab, for he was a descendant of Ruth. There would be a white strip embroidered in silver with

Genesis 1 & 2. There would be two more white strips embroidered with the tree of life and the tree of good and evil, representing the choices one makes in life. The next strip would be stripes of many colors, as after Joseph's coat of many colors, signifying that this child would become the head or chief of his family. The last strip would be the shepherd's plaid, boxes of gold and white for David was a shepherd and Christ a descendant of David and considered a shepherd. (The source for this was from Brent Sloan who did research at BYU. Also, similar findings were done by Marie Nielsen Schreiner and Mme. Lydia M. Von Finelstein Mountford.) **WHAT IS A MANGER AND WHAT WAS IT MOST LIKELY MADE OF? It was most likely made of stone.)**

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

14 ^aGlory to God in the highest, and on earth ^bpeace, good will to men. (The Greek version is "among men of good will" or "among men who are righteous.")

15 And it came to pass, **(when)** 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 ha(s) made known unto us.

16 And they came with ^ahaste, (The shepherds did not wait, they went immediately. Bethlehem sat upon the top of a hill, so when the shepherds looked at Bethlehem from their flocks, they looked up, as we look up today to the Lord.) and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17 And when they had seen, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. (We also, should make known abroad the restored gospel in our day.)

18 All they **(who)** heard *it* ^awondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary kept all these things, and ^apondered *them* in her heart.

20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things **(which)** they had heard and seen, as **(they were manifested)** unto them.

21 And when eight days were accomplished for the ^acircumcising of the child, his name was called ^bJESUS, which was so ^cnamed of the angel before he was conceived.

22 And when the days of her ^apurification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, (The period of purification was 40 days for a male child and 80 days for a female.) they brought him to Jerusalem, (It was 5 or 6 miles from Bethlehem to Jerusalem.) to present *him* to the Lord;

23 (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male **(which)** openeth the ^awomb shall be called holy to the Lord;) (All first born sons had to be redeemed from service in the sanctuary. Talmage said: "In remembrance of this manifestation of power (the killing of the Egyptians' first born) the Israelites were required to dedicate their firstborn sons to the service of the sanctuary. Subsequently the Lord directed that all males belonging to the tribe of Levi should be devoted to this special labor instead of the firstborn in every tribe; nevertheless the eldest son was still claimed as particularly the Lord's own, and had to be formally exempted from the earlier requirements of service by the paying of a ransom. Jesus the Christ, p. 90-91)

24 And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is **(written)** in the law of the Lord, A pair of ^aturtledoves, or two young pigeons. (Every mother was supposed to furnish a yearling lamb for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or dove for a sin offering; but in the case of any woman who was unable to provide a lamb, a pair of doves or pigeons might be offered. We learn of the humble circumstances of Joseph and Mary from the fact that they brought the less costly offering, two doves or pigeons, instead of one bird and lamb. Jesus the Christ, p. 91 "The modest temporal circumstances of Joseph and Mary

are apparent from their presentation of the less costly sacrificial offering.” DNTC, p. 99)

25 And, behold, there was a man **(at)** 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. **(Simeon was a prophet. Mortal Messiah, p. 354)**

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 thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:

30 For mine eyes have seen thy ^asalvation,

31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

32 A ^alight ^bto lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

33 And Joseph and **(Mary)** marvelled at those things which were spoken of **(the child)**.

34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary, Behold, this *child* is ^aset for the ^bfall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;

35 (Yea, a sword shall ^apierce through **(him to the wounding of thine)** own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.



36 And there was one Anna, a ^aprophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of As(h)er: she was of a great age, and had lived with a husband **(only)** seven years **(, whom she married in her youth;)**

37 And she **(lived)** a widow about fourscore and four years, **(who)** departed not from the temple, but served *God* with ^afastings and prayers night and day. (“Assuming she married at the age of twelve, which is possible in the East, Anna thus would have been at least 103.” DNTC, p. 101)

38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all **(those who)** looked for ^aredemption in Jerusalem.

39a And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord,

Matthew 2:1 NOW
when Jesus was ^aborn

in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, **(WHO WERE THE WISE MEN? Elder McConckie has said: “As to the men themselves, one thing is clear. They had prophetic insight. It was with them as it had been with saintly Simeon: the Lord had revealed to them, as it were, that they should not taste death until they had seen and worshipped the Christ. They knew the King of the Jews had been born, and they knew that a new star was destined to arise and had arisen in connection with that birth. The probability is they were themselves Jews who lived, as millions of Jews then did, in one of the nations to the East.” Mortal**



Messiah, p. 358 “...an unspecified number of wise men. Whether they were two, three, or twenty in number is a matter of pure speculation. To suppose they were members of the apostate religious

cult of the Magi of ancient Media and Persia is probably false. Rather, it would appear they were true prophets, righteous persons like Simeon, Anna, and the shepherds, to whom Deity revealed that the promised Messiah had been born among men.” DNTC, p. 103 It may be possible that while Lehi was in Arabia, a period of eight years, he taught the people near where they lived. If so, he would have taught them that the Messiah was coming 600 years after his departure from Jerusalem. However, he would not have known the city of the Messiah’s birth, because Micah’s prophecy (Micah 5:2) was written after Lehi left Jerusalem and he would not have had it. These, however, would have been Arabian Jews. According to the Bible Dictionary, frankincense comes from Arabia. The Bible dictionary also says that Myrrh is from Arabia and eastern Africa. Isaiah 60:6 says: “...all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord.” Sheba was southern Arabia. Bountiful, where Lehi lived for 8 years, is thought to be in southern Arabia.)

2 Saying, ^aWhere is (the child) that is born (the Messiah) of the Jews? for we have seen his ^cstar in the east, and (have) come to ^dworship him. (HOW WOULD THE WISE MEN HAVE KNOWN TO LOOK FOR A STAR? Numbers 24:17 says: There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel. Maybe the prophets interpreted that to mean a new star would arise at his birth. (According to Hugh Nibley, this event may have been caused by a supernova which would explain the light that continued after the going down of the sun and the new star arising, but which later disappeared.) Elder McConkie said: “As to the star, there is nothing mysterious about it. The [wise men]...were not reading portents in the skies nor divining the destinies of men by the movement of celestial bodies in the sidereal heavens. The new star was simply a new star of the sort we are familiar with. No doubt it exhibited an unusual brilliance, so as to attract special attention and so as to give guidance to those who walked in its light, but it was, nonetheless, a star. Mortal Messiah, p. 359. Helaman 14: 5 And behold, there shall a new ^astar arise, (Fulfilled in 3 Nephi 1:21. Our Lord’s birth into mortality was accompanied by the appearance of a “new star” in the heavens. It is apparent that another prophet, or perhaps even a number of prophets in the Old World, had also prophesied of this sign, for when the wise men arrived in Jerusalem seeking the “Messiah of the Jews” they said, “We have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him” (JST, Matthew 3:2). The statement seems to assume that the Jews of Jerusalem were aware that a new star would bear record of the holy birth, as at least the leaders were that the birth itself would take place in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). After the wise men had been questioned by Herod, “the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. (Matthew 2:9-10.) There is no Old Testament prophecy on this aspect of the Savior’s birth that is comparable to that of Samuel the Lamanite. The nearest allusion is found in the prophecy of Balaam, who, speaking of the Messiah himself, said: “There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel” (Numbers 24:17). This prophecy obviously refers to the first coming of Christ but does not announce itself as indicating a sign of his birth. The only other related passage is in the book of Revelation, where Christ refers to himself as “the bright and morning star” (Revelation 22:16). The appearance of a star, or of a phenomenon of light accompanying the birth of one destined to a significant role in history, is a common motif in the literature of the ancient Near East. Such legends are but the dim reflection of the lost prophecy of the star that was to announce the Messiah’s birth. DCBM, 3:409-410) such an one as ye never have beheld; and this also shall be a sign unto you. (Bruce R. McConkie: “In listing the signs to attend the birth of Jesus, Samuel the Lamanite prophesied: ‘There shall a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld.’ (Hela. 14:5.) That this new star was seen by the whole Nephite nation at the actual time of the heavenly birth, is also recorded in the Book of Mormon. (3 Ne. 1:21.) There is, however, no comparable Messianic prophecy in the Bible as we now have it. The nearest allusion to such is found in the prophecy of Balaam who, speaking of Messiah himself, said: ‘There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel.’ (Num. 24:17.) But there can be little doubt that others besides the Nephites knew by revelation that great

signs and wonders, including the rise of a new star, were to attend Messiah's birth. The language of the wise men, upon reaching Jerusalem, clearly assumes that the Jews were just as aware that a new star would bear record of the holy birth as they were that the birth itself should take place in Bethlehem.” (Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, p. 103-4)

3 When Herod the king had heard (of the child,) he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. (Herod was a Jew a descendant of Ishmael and Esau.)

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he ^ademanded of them, (saying,) ^bwhere (is the place that is written of by the prophets, in which) Christ should be born. (For he greatly feared, yet he believed not the prophets.)

5 And they said unto him, (It is written by the prophets, that he should be born) In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus (have they said),

6 (The word of the Lord came unto us, saying,) And thou ^aBethlehem, (which lieth) in the land of (Judea, in thee shall be born a prince, which) art not the least among the princes of Jud(e)a: for out of thee shall come a ^cGovernor, (the Messiah, who) shall (save) my people Israel.

7 Then Herod, when he had called the wise men (privily), enquired 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 (the child), bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

9 (TO WHERE DID THE STAR POINT?) When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, (until) it came and stood over where the young child was. (In the house in Bethlehem.)

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 ^afrankincense, and myrrh. (HOW OLD WAS JESUS WHEN THE WISE MEN VISITED HIM? The time frame of their visit: more than seven weeks after his birth and quite possibly several months or even nearly three years elapsed between this visit and the nativity. It could not have taken place during Mary's forty days of purification, because immediately following them the holy family went to Nazareth to live, whereas following the visit of these eastern prophets, Joseph, Mary and Jesus fled into Egypt for a season. It is worthy of note that the wise men found Jesus in a house not a stable, inn, or temporary abiding place; that he is called "young child" not a baby, a total of seven times in the course of references to the diligent nature of Herod's inquiry as to the actual time of the birth; and that a child

is two years of age until the time of his third birthday. Now assuming that Herod would order the massacre of all young children in the general age bracket involved, still the presumption arises that a number of months or even one or two years may have elapsed before the arrival of the eastern visitors.” DNTC, p. 106-7)

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

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

14 (And then) he arose, (and) took the young child and (the child's) 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 ^aEgypt have I called my son. (“Since Herod is believed to have died when Jesus was two or three years old, our Lord’s sojourn in that land may have been as short as a few months.” DNTC, p. 104)

16 ¶ Then Herod, when he saw that he was ^amocked of the wise men, ^bwas exceeding wrath, and sent forth, and ^cslew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and all the ^dcoasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men. (The edict to kill all boys, not children, but boys under the age of two probably did not exceed the number of 20. Mortal Messiah, p. 363.)

17 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by (Jeremiah) the prophet, saying,

18 In ^aRama there (was) a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great ^bmourning, Rachel weeping for (the loss of) her ^cchildren, and would not be comforted, because they (were) not.

19 ¶ But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appear(d) in a (vision) to Joseph in Egypt,

20 Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the ^aland of Israel: for they are dead (who) 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.

22 But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the (stead) of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: (but) notwithstanding, being warned of God in a (vision) he (went) into the (eastern) parts of Galilee:

23 And he came and dwelt in a city called ^aNazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was ^bspoken by the prophets, He shall be called a ^cNazarene.

Luke 2:39b they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.

40 And the child grew, and ^awaxed strong in spirit, (being) filled with wisdom: and the ^bgrace of God was upon him.

(According to Elder McConkie, at the time of the espousment and marriage, Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth; they traveled to Bethlehem for the birth; Jesus was circumcised in Bethlehem; after the 40 days, they traveled to Jerusalem to present Jesus at the temple; they then returned to Nazareth; they then moved to Bethlehem for an unknown reason, obtained a house there and were there when the wise men came; warned of God they went into Egypt; then after Herod’s death they planned on returning to Bethlehem, but for fear of Herod’s son, they went to Nazareth. Jesus lived in Nazareth probably 27 or 28 years. DNTC, p. 109) (WHAT WAS JOSEPH’S AND THEREFORE JESUS’ PROFESSION IN NAZARETH?) (Elder Talmage said: “He came among men to experience all the natural conditions of mortality; He was born as truly a dependent, helpless babe as is any other child; His infancy was in all common features as the infancy of others; His boyhood was actual boyhood, His development was as necessary and as real as that of all children. Over His mind had fallen the veil of forgetfulness common to all who are born to earth, by which the remembrance of primeval existence is shut off. The Child grew, and with growth there came to Him expansion of mind, development of faculties, and progression in power and understanding. His advancement was from one grace to another, not from gracelessness to grace; from good to greater good, not from evil to good, from favor with God to greater favor, not from estrangement because of sin to reconciliation through repentance and propitiation. Our knowledge of Jewish life in that age justifies the inference that the Boy was well taught in the law and the scriptures, for such was the rule. He garnered knowledge by study, and gained wisdom by prayer, thought, and effort. Beyond question He was trained to labor, for idleness was abhorred then as it is now; and every Jewish boy, whether carpenter’s sons, peasant’s child or rabbi’s heir, was required to learn and follow a practical and productive vocation. Jesus was all that a boy

should be, for His development was unretarded by the dragging weight of sin; he loved and obeyed the truth and therefore was free. Jesus the Christ, p. 105-106)

(“Although western language Bibles refer to Mary’s husband as a carpenter, the Greek Bible calls him a craftsman. The industry of Nazareth was, and still is, the regional rock quarry.” New Testament Supplemental Study Material, Daniel Rona, p. 16. Joseph, and hence Jesus, did not just work with wood, but with stone, metal, and other elements. Most homes in the region were made from rock and stone.)



The purpose of the story of Jesus’ birth is to bear testimony that Jesus is the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world. This I so testify.

All Biblical scriptures quoted are from the Joseph Smith Translation. These are highlighted in purple.

Other sources used: Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Bruce R. McConkie; Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage; New Testament Supplemental Study Material, Daniel Rona; The Mortal Messiah, Bruce R. McConkie; The Manger and the Inn, Kenneth Bailey; Research Project at BYU, Brent Sloan; Marie Nielsen Schreiner and Mme. Lydia M. Von Finelstein Mountford; The Life and Teachings of Jesus and His Apostles, Institute Manual; Guide to the Life of Christ, Richard Anderson.