

84 - The real present this Christmas is in the manger, not under the tree!

I spoke to someone this week about what to do about Christmas. This person had a lot of warm fuzzy memories of Christmas, loved the celebration and closeness with family. The concern was, with what we know about how traditions have become so polluted, is there a celebration to have, and if so, what kind of celebration would make the Father smile? I could totally relate because Christmas time for me is full of some of the warmest memories of *my* growing up and my kids growing up.

Barbara makes it real simple, it's Jesus' birthday! Now, what does that look like? So, on the phone with our friend, we crafted a new kind of Christmas celebration...one to build new memories on that are every bit as warm and fuzzy as those embedded in our memories.

Let's face it: from Thanksgiving on, the Christmas season is a festival of the senses:

Sights include brightly colored lights and candles inside and out; evergreen, holly leaves and red berries; snow; big guys in funny-looking red suits with white trim; reindeer and sleighs; crackling fires; and beautifully wrapped packages nestled under lit-up, ornament-laden, and tinsel draped fir trees positioned proudly in the front window. When I lived in New England, I got used to seeing electric candles in the windows of almost every house on every street.

Probably one of my most favorite sights was the incredible brightness in the clear winter sky of the planet Venus—hanging like the proverbial star of Bethlehem—overhead as we drove home from the candlelight service at church on Christmas Eve, which was a marvelous pageant for the eyes all by itself! The cavernous sanctuary of this enormous, imposing stone cathedral was decked in candlelight, evergreen wreathes and garlands tied with red ribbon bows *everywhere*; choirs from every age group were assembled together in red robes and white collars. Orchestra musicians we never saw any other time of year came with newly polished brass and wood instruments. And the place was packed from floor to balcony with people from all over the city. On the drive home, we'd often stop by a house that had a life-size nativity scene floodlit on the front yard. It was a final reminder, before we went down for the night, of what we were celebrating.

So light up your home every way you want, inside and out! Fill the place with garlands, ribbons and candles. Just leave the trees in the ground!

Here's what Barbara writes in her book, *GOD IS GOD and We Are NOT!*, Volume 1, which is soon to be published in a revised and expanded edition:

Read Chapter 21 of GOD IS GOD...

If you want to cut something down this Christmas, gather some wood and build your own nativity scene. Let *IT* be the center of attention, and let it remind us that all Joseph and Mary could see that night, more than 2,000 years ago, when there was nowhere else to go, was a place called, in Hebrew, "Migdal Eder" as it was known around Bethlehem—meaning "Tower of the Flock." Maybe there was a lamp in the "birthing area" to shed some light on the most special birth of all.

Harold Smith, publisher of the online newsletter, "[He That Has an Ear](#)," writes, "*Although obscure and often overlooked, the prophet, Micah, more than 700 years earlier, disclosed that the Messiah, who embodied the hope of the Kingdom, 'was to be revealed from Migdal Eder, 'the Watch-tower of the Flock'.*"

Micah 4:8 (CLV)

And you, tower of the drove [flock], Fort of the daughter of Zion, unto you shall it arrive, even the former rule will come, the kingdom to the daughter of Jerusalem.

There is only one such place in all of Israel, and we'll see that archaeologists think that Joseph's ancestral home in Bethlehem, where there was no room for the holy family that first Christmas night, is about 40 yards away from Migdal Eder.

Let's go to Luke's account:

Luke 2:7

And she brought forth her Son, the firstborn, and swaddles Him, and cradles Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the caravansary.

As we retrace this story that everyone thinks they know so well because they've heard it so many times, take note of the detail with which God infuses the most significant event in history up to this point:

For instance, the words, "the firstborn" are significant. If you've been with me in these studies for any length of time, you know how important the definite article is—that is, the word THE. When it is used, **THE** means that whatever word that follows is a highly specific reference. "The Firstborn" must be the One to whom Paul referred in **Romans 8:29** – "*Firstborn among many brethren,*" – where the definite article also appears.

This was not just any firstborn. He was certainly not Joseph's; no, This was THE FIRSTBORN, God's "*only begotten son*" (**Hebrews 11:17**).

Next, Mary "*swaddled*" the baby. Keep that in mind for later. Also, make a note of cradling the baby "*in a manger*," and get ready to have your images of this birth re-formed. Finally, the site was chosen because, as the scripture reads, "**there was no place for them in the caravansary.**" A caravansary was not an inn, but, according to the Greek definition from the Concordant Literal Keyword Concordance, it was "*the place where the load of a beast of burden is loosed and let down.*" Joseph couldn't find room ANYWHERE, not even a stable! So...where did they go, and what's it all mean?

Strap in here, 'cause this is mind-blowing to me and I hope it will give you so much greater an appreciation for How specific God is in every detail, not only in this magnificent story of the Lord's advent on the Earth, but even in the details of your everyday life. The Father leaves nothing to chance, no coincidences. All is in perfect order, and in each piece of this story and Your story, His word—His promise—is fulfilled, which He magnifies, along with His name, above all else (**Psalms 138** declares).

Our story continues in **Luke 2:8** . . .

And shepherds were in the same district in the field fold, and maintaining watches at night over their flock.

Smith writes that, "nearby where the shepherds were camped that night, in the northern part of Bethlehem on the road to Jerusalem (less than an hour's journey by foot), was the tower known as Migdal Eder, the "watch-tower of the flock." This was the station where shepherds cared for their flocks destined for sacrifices in the Temple. For animals found as far from Jerusalem to the north of Bethlehem and within that circuit on every side, the males were offered as burnt-offerings, the females as peace-offerings.

As Smith describes, these were not a random group of rag-tag shepherds like those portrayed in every nativity production I've seen. Smith continues,

On the night in which Yeshua was born, the angel's message came to those priests of the Temple whose duties had been designated, often from their youth, to "keeping watch over their flock." These were not just any flock and herd. The shepherds who kept them were men who were specifically trained for this royal task. They were educated in what an animal that was to be sacrificed had to be and it was their job to make sure that none of the animals were hurt, damaged or blemished. These lambs were apparently wrapped in "swaddling cloths" (a gauze-like cloth - not a birthing cloth) to insure protection from injury - also used to wrap Yeshua haMashiach. During lambing season the sheep were brought to the tower from the fields, as the

lower level functioned as the birthing room for sacrificial lambs. Being themselves under special rabbinical care, these priests would strictly maintain a ceremonially clean birthing place. Once birthed, the priestly shepherds would routinely place the lambs in the hewn depression of a limestone rock known as a "manger" and "wrap the newborn lambs in swaddling clothes," preventing them from thrashing about and harming themselves "until they had calmed down" so they could be inspected for the quality of being "without spot or blemish" (ibid, Mishnah. *the Jewish oral tradition* & Alfred Edersheim, *the Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*).

Luke 2:9

And lo! a messenger of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of God shines about them, and they were afraid with a great fear.

Talk about one of the great sights of Christmas! And this sight is soon to be eclipsed when the shepherds lay their eyes on Jesus, Yeshua haMashiach, lying in a manger.

Luke 2:16-17

And they came hurrying, and they found both Miriam and Joseph, and the Babe lying in the manger.

17 Now, perceiving it, they make known concerning the declaration that is spoken to them concerning this little Boy.

Notice that the messengers—angels—didn't tell the shepherds where Jesus was. How did they know where to go? Harold Smith writes:



There was no need for the angels to give these shepherds directions to the birth place because they already knew. These were the men who raised sacrificial lambs that were sacrificed in the Temple. When the angelic announcement came, they knew exactly where to go, as Luke 2 indicates, for the sign of a manger could only mean **their** manger at the base of [Migal Eder], the [Watch-]Tower of the Flock! You cannot explain the meaning or direction of the sign they were given or their response unless you have the right manger and the right shepherds.

Before we move from the sights of Christmas to the other senses that are such an integral part of our memories of every experience we've ever had, including our memories of Christmas, let's look at what drove Joseph and Mary to the Tower of the flock—to Migdal Eder—in the first place. We're told throughout traditions that there was simply no room for them, and that's a logical conclusion because of the crowd in Bethlehem at the time due to the census. But this was Joseph's ancestral home—it was where David would have been born!

Harold smith writes:

Tradition would have us believe that Joseph and Mary were "stuck" in a stable as a means of last resort to give birth to Jesus, but there is no evidence found anywhere in scripture to support that assertion. Boaz was the great-grandfather of King David ([1Chronicles 2:12-15](#), [Matthew 1:5-6](#)). of whose lineage came Joseph, wedded to Mary, who gave birth to Yeshua known as haMashiach (the Messiah). Boaz owned a threshing floor in Bethlehem which, by right of inheritance, was handed down to succeeding generations within the lineage of David ([Ruth 2:4](#), [Ruth 3:1-2](#)). Caesar Augustus ordered a census of the entire Roman world, which meant that all people had to return to their place of birth. Joseph was a descendant of David and so returned from Nazareth in Galilee, to *the family home in Bethlehem* in Judea, where David was also born and which had subsequently been turned into an inn.

According to the Torah, when a woman had an issue of blood for any reason, including childbirth, she was ritually unclean for that time and for seven days thereafter, until she was purified by water immersion in the witnessing presence of a rabbi. While she was ritually unclean, she had to live separately from the rest of the family so as not to defile the people in the household and by her presence rendering them ceremonially unclean. Therefore, the woman would leave and stay in a nearby area where she would not defile the home. ([Leviticus 15:19-23](#)). If Mary were to have given birth in the common living area, she would have defiled the family and make it necessary for them to be ceremonially purified by both a ritual immersion and a sacrifice. Thus, there was "*...no place for them,*" and they went to the only other place they could find...

Just above the shepherd's field, northeast of modern Bethlehem, lie the ruins of ancient Bethlehem Ephrathah. [Genesis 35:19](#) and [48:7](#) both state that Rachel was buried at "Ephrath, which is Bethlehem." Ephrath or Ephrathah was the ancient name for the area that was also called Bethlehem. According to a prominent Israeli archeologist, the biblical record of Micah 4:8 and other evidences lead us to conclude that Yeshua was not born in the stable of an inn where donkeys and other animals were kept.

Dr. Carl Baugh, president of Creation Evidence Museum in Glen Rose, Texas, is currently excavating a site where he tells of finding a huge door, weighing some 600 pounds. On it were carvings of ancient Israeli Temple motifs - four sets of angel's wings, a menorah, a picture of the Urim and Thummim and the symbol for the house of David. Behind the door, three underground chambers were found, that they believe were used for inspecting the sacrificial animals. They also found a mosaic tile inscription saying that it was the birthplace of Yeshua. The archeologists

are also convinced that they have *found the ruins of an inn about forty yards up the hill*. It does not take a leap of imagination to envision how Joseph and Mary, coming from a family whose local roots went back centuries and contained the seed of royalty, could have found her birthing place in the sacrificial birthing room of the Temple of YHVH. It is so like the Father to arrange it.

Doesn't this complete a very different picture of Jesus' birth...its circumstances and surroundings?

The Sounds of Christmas for us include Christmas music everywhere—in stores and on the radio—some of it sacred and some of it purely obnoxious, and some on stations 24/7 until after Christmas Day. Christmas concerts at schools, symphony halls, and churches bring out people who otherwise might avoid live performances and may not cross a church's threshold at any other time of year—well, maybe at Easter, but that's another story.

In my neighborhood growing up, groups of carolers came around from time to time in the weeks leading up to Christmas Day. Since Dad was a high school and church choral director, caroling from house to house was something that just went with Christmas.

What sounds were heard on the night of the first Christmas? In Israel, in late September or early October, perhaps a soft wind may have been heard along with the familiar sounds of sheep grazing and bleating...until those altogether familiar sounds were broken by the appearance of messengers from heaven. Not only would the sight have riveted the shepherds on the hills that night, but the sounds that accompanied their message!

Luke 2:13-14

And suddenly with the messenger there came to be a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God among the Highest! And on earth peace, Among men, delight!"

The shepherds' message was a new sound heard by people whom they told of seeing Israel's long-awaited Messiah. Whatever other sounds were heard that night...and likely for days following, this was one every child of Israel longed to hear:

Luke 2:17-18

Now, perceiving it, they make known concerning the declaration that is spoken to them concerning this little Boy.

18 And all who hear marvel concerning that which is being spoken to them by the shepherds.

When we think of the **smells** of Christmas, we remember crisp winter air, wood fires, evergreen and wool; fresh baked everything, gingerbread, and mulling spices; scented candles and potpourri; roasting turkeys, geese, pork loin, and beef.

I don't know what fall smells like in Israel, but when we look at where Jesus was likely born, and who came to see him first, the smells of a barn come to mind. Anywhere animals have been has a distinct smell. Newborn babies also have the most wonderful sweet scent, and I feel confident that the scent of the newborn Jesus was delightful to Mary and Joseph...and to the Father in heaven who looked on the birth of His Son, along with all the celestials.

Tastes of Christmas are inseparable from the smells of freshly baked cookies and fudge; breads of all description; cured smoked or meats and cheeses everyone becomes a candy-maker.

The Feel of Christmas is warm and soft, even in the midst of the harshest winter. I doubt that the "The Watchtower of the Flock" would have felt very warm that fall night in Bethlehem.

Harold Smith writes:

Luke's original audience would have immediately picked up on the religious significance of the Bethlehem shepherds watching their flocks by night. Aware of the Tanakh (Old Testament) and the Jewish Temple worship of the day, they would have known that when you said Bethlehem, you said "sacrificial lambs". The hills around Bethlehem were home to the thousands of lambs used in ritual worship in the Temple. David, as a boy from Bethlehem, likely tended sheep destined for the daily offerings or used in the sacrifices on the high holidays in these very hills. Every day, according to the Torah, two lambs were required for sacrifice in the Temple, meaning that 730 were needed each year plus the tens of thousands more lambs needed by families at Pesach (Passover) and for other religious rituals. When you say Bethlehem, you say sacrificial lambs.

A male lamb was the first offering and the last offering of each day. It was the "tamid" in

Hebrew, the continuous offering. The Hebrew word *tamiym*, (translated for lambs “without spot or blemish”) means *complete, whole, entire, sound* and is the same word used as "perfect". It was during the hour of the final sacrifice of the day that Yeshua was offered up as that sacrificial lamb, once and for all, continually. Hearing that Yeshua was born in Bethlehem would have automatically triggered an image of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, beginning with Adam in [Genesis 3](#). With that in mind, it's easy for us to imagine one of Luke's listeners saying, *“Of course the Lamb of God would originate in Bethlehem - all the lambs for sacrifice came from there.”* It would be natural for them to pick up on this imagery.

So...if we cast aside the traditions of our youth, which are rooted in pagan rituals around so-called Christmas trees and mythical figures like Santa Claus, what does the genuine Christmas celebration look like from Heaven's View? What would warm the Father's heart, and perhaps bring a smile to the Savior's face?

By all means, throw a party – get out the lights, the candles, the garland, the holly, the bows and the ribbons! Turn the Christmas hymns up loud throughout the house and sing along! Forget Rockin' around the Christmas tree, Frosty the Snowman and Jingle Bells. Joy to the world, and Oh Come all ye Faithful, Oh holy Night – bring those on!

Light the fire and get out the advent calendar...light one more candle each week until Christmas...read the story to one another, night after night. Look at all we saw tonight that almost everyone we know misses out on! If you want to find the biggest and best Christmas Eve service, GO...be blessed and bless God!

Roast the goose and bake the pies. Give gifts to one another, not out of some perverted obligation, but out of love and gratitude for one another. Don't waste money. What can you buy God? Make something...write something...give from your heart.

Whatever you do, wherever you are and with whomever God has you this Christmas, thank the Father for sending Jesus and thank Jesus for giving up His spot with the Father in Heaven to join us on Earth...to save us and set us free from the curse of sin and death.

Make this Christmas the beginning of a grand and holy tradition that welcomes the presence of God into your home and into the hearts of all who cross your threshold in Jesus' name. Amen.

