

The Appointed Times IV The Birth of Jesus

Michael Heiss—October 20, 2016

Today we're going to start in aspects of the life Jesus Christ, especially the birth, the annunciation, the wise men and the star.

Matthew 1:18: "And the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: Now, His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph; *but* before they came together, she was found to be with child of *the* Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous *man*, and not willing to expose her publicly, was planning to divorce her secretly" (vs 18-19). A Jewish marriage has two parts to it:

- betrothal
- consummation

It is definitely different from an engagement. Today, you know how that goes: boy meets girl, they get engaged, boy gives girl a ring and in two weeks, six weeks, six months, sometimes years later they finally get married.

In this case, the betrothal was a legally binding marriage; it was legal. The only way to get out of it was a divorce. There was a year apart from betrothal and consummation, and the purpose of that was to make sure she was still a virgin one year later. Of course, in this case, Mary wasn't.

Joseph had no idea what was happening. He didn't know about any annunciation to Mary. All he knew that his bride was pregnant. He being a just person—kind and considerate—did not want to make a spectacle of her, so he was going to grant her what we call *a bill of divorce*. His authority for that comes from the book of Deuteronomy; we'll find authority for divorce.

Deuteronomy 24:1: "When a man has taken a wife and married her, and it comes to pass that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her... [pregnancy would certainly qualify for that] ...then let him write her a bill of divorce and put *it* in her hand, and send her out of his house." You can read what would happen if she married somebody else, and this happens and that happens in vs 2-6. Know that this is the authority for Joseph putting away Mary, and he was going to do that.

Matthew 1:20: "But as he pondered these things, behold, an angel of *the* Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to *be your wife*...'" Notice what the angel said, they were married, and this is acknowledging it.

"...because that which has been begotten in her is of *the* Holy Spirit. And she shall give birth to a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins.' Now, all this came to pass that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall give birth to a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel,' which is being interpreted, 'God with us.'" (vs 20-23).

The source comes from Isaiah 7:14: "Therefore, the LORD Himself shall give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive..."

For quite a while I was a little perplexed for the simple reason that the Hebrew word for woman or virgin is 'eolme' and all this means is *a young woman*. Theoretically, it could be a married woman, a single woman or a pregnant woman; that's all it really means. I was trying to figure out how you definitely know that this is a virgin?

What I didn't realize, and found out later—I knew this had happened but didn't understand the particular version Matthew was quoting from. In the mid third century, the Ptolemies in Egypt—Ptolemy II in particular—was building his great library. He knew of the Torah, the works of the Law, in the temple in Jerusalem. He wanted a copy of that, so they got together many scholars to come to Egypt and they copied and translated the Old Testament into Greek.

When these scholars translated it into Greek, they used a word in Greek that was not exactly 'eolme'; that really did mean and could mean *virgin*. So, when Matthew says, 'Behold, the virgin' he is quoting from the Septuagint. For years my thought was that they wouldn't do that, and why they didn't go the original Hebrew. Of course, I realized that most Jews didn't understand Hebrew anymore, they didn't speak it. They spoke Aramaic as the everyday language. For the educated ones, those in business, those who could read literature, they spoke Greek.

Obviously, what translation would Matthew be quoting from? *The Greek translation!* Therefore, it really does mean *virgin*. If you go to the Hebrew, sometimes that doesn't give you the whole story; you just have to realize what version Matthew was quoting from. He was quoting from the Septuagint, and that's why he's able to say *virgin*, because the word there does mean *virgin*.

Joseph had a dream and dreams were very,

very important, and one of God's preferred ways of communicating with people was through a dream. If you had a dream, and an angel appeared in that dream advising you, telling you what to do or what's going to happen, believe me, you would sit up and take notice, because you knew this was from God. Or if God Himself appeared to you in a dream in some form, you would sit up and take notice.

In fact, it was said in those days that there were three great marks of favor, that you were a very favorable person and that events were shining upon you if three things happened to you:

1. you had a good king, a wise king
2. you had a fruitful years; your crops came in, they were bountiful, your orchards were full
3. a good dream

So, you had a good dream, you were blessed and you were fortunate. So, a dream was important.

Matthew 1:24: "And when Joseph was awakened from his sleep, he did as the angel of *the* Lord had commanded, and took his wife to *wed*; but he did not have sexual relations *with* her until *after* she had given birth to her Son, the firstborn; and he called His name Jesus" (vs 24-25).

The Magi and the Star:

I'm going to give a possible explanation of what that star was. I don't know if the star they saw in the East two years previously was exactly the same star that went before them to Bethlehem. It's a little unclear. But in order to get there I have to tell you a little about logic and my experience with logic, and how I misunderstood for a number of years what God is trying to tell us.

Matthew 2:1: "Now, after Jesus had been born in Bethlehem of Judea, in *the* days of Herod the king, behold, Magi from *the* east arrived at Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is the One Who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east, and have come to worship Him'" (vs 1-2).

Utt-oh! You don't say that to Herod. This fellows is nasty: beside himself, paranoid, violent and will kill anybody he thinks maybe trying to take his throne.

Verse 3: "But when Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him... [all Jerusalem knew what he was capable of doing] ...And after gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ should be born" (vs 3-4). He didn't know.

Verse 5: "Then they said to him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written by

the prophet: "And you, Bethlehem, land of Judea, in no way are you least among the princes of Judea; for out of you shall come forth a Prince, Who shall shepherd My people Israel.'" Then Herod secretly called *for* the Magi *and* ascertained from them the *exact* time of the appearing of *the* star" (vs 5-7). They told him when they first saw it.

Verse 8: "And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the little Child; and when you have found *Him*, bring word back to me, so that I also may go and worship Him.'" That was about as big a lie as Herod ever told. He was not about to worship this Child. He was going to get rid of Him!

Verse 9: "And after hearing the king, they departed; and behold, the star that they had seen in the east went in front of them, until it came and stood over *the house* where the little Child was."

When it says that the star went in front of them "...and stood over *the house*..." This is picturesque language. How did the star stand above the house? 10 feet above the house? 100 feet? Was it in the sky? Where? How?

They're just describing that there definitely was a star or what looked like a star, and it was over Bethlehem.

Verse 10: "And after seeing the star, they rejoiced *with* exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they found the little Child with Mary His mother, and they bowed down and worshiped Him; then they opened their treasures *and* presented their gifts to Him—gold and frankincense and myrrh. But being Divinely instructed in a dream not to go back to Herod..." (vs 10-12).

You'll notice that God instructed them in a dream; they took the dream seriously.

"...they returned to their own country by another way. Now, after they had departed, behold, an angel of *the* Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, 'Arise and take the little Child and His mother, and escape into Egypt, and remain there until I shall tell you; for Herod is about to seek the little Child to destroy Him' And he arose by night and took the little Child and His mother, and went into Egypt, And was there until the death of Herod..." (vs 12-15).

Verse 16: "Then Herod, seeing that he had been mocked by the Magi, was filled with rage; and he sent *and* put to death all the boys who *were* in Bethlehem and in the area all around, from two years old and under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the Magi." About two years!

That's why he killed all the children two

years and under. So therefore, this star—whatever it was that the Magi saw appeared two years prior, and they saw when they were in their own country in the East.

For years I had gone under the assumption that Jesus was born in 4_{B.C.} and started His ministry in 27_{B.C.} in the fall, first Passover was in 28_{B.C.} and three years later was crucified in 31_{A.D.} At least this was the way it was taught much earlier in the days of the Worldwide Church of God. It seemed valid to me. I didn't know anything, and I thought that it looked reasonable, so I accepted it.

When it came to looking at what *the star* might have been, we know historically and astronomically that there is a feature when certain planets almost converge and shine as a great shining star. When this happens, you can't miss it. It is big and bright!

If Christ was born in 4_{B.C.}, and you go back two years to 6_{B.C.} from the astronomical tables there is no such converging of those planets. There is a converging of those planets in 7_{B.C.} In fact, it was shown to have happened three times. I will read some it to you from Edersheim's massive work. If you care to go through all 1,000-plus pages, it will knock your socks off. But it contains a lot of information, and it had to do with logic.

I'm going take some time out and explain my introduction to logic, and how I finally learned how to work this, how to understand this. Before I didn't know. There are two types of logic:

1. inductive
2. deductive

Inductive logic you can never come to an accurate conclusion. You look at all the evidence. In this case you might look at certain verses, you might look at archeological evidence, you might look at the meanings of the Greek words, the Hebrew words—whatever it is.

Some of it's going to point this way and some of it might point that way. When you gather all the information that you can, all the data, you look and say, 'Well, most of it seems to point this way, so I guess we'll go with that. But you can never be absolutely sure.

One of the classic examples is this: In an imaginary town in the U.S. you have large population of Armenians. This is the example given in logic courses. You're going to hold a big bash, a feast, for the Armenians. You have a list of names and one name in particular you don't know if he's an Armenian or not. How do you choose.

You do some sleuthing and you find that, lo

and behold, he's a member of the Armenian Club. That's a pretty good indication that he's an Armenian. But then upon further investigation, what do you find? *Of those members of the Armenian Club, 10% are not Armenians!*

Now what do you do? If you go strictly by inductive reasoning, you go on and give him an invitation in hopes that he's among the 90% and not the 10%. But you can't be sure.

Deductive reasoning: I was taking some classes at Hebrew University in Los Angeles. It was actually *Jewish Studies Department of Hebrew Union College*, which was a part of USC. In one of my classes we had a visiting professor from Jerusalem. He called each one of in for an oral exam. I wasn't the best of that type of thing, and I didn't know much about this course in those days, so I started my little spiel to answer the questions.

He said, 'You need to learn discourse; you need to learn to take a premise an assumption—in logic they call them *givens*—you look at the data, the Scriptures, the historical record and you interpret your facts in the light of your premise. Then by interpreting the facts, the data, in the light of the premise, you prove your premise.

Well, immediately I just blurted out, without thinking, 'that's reasoning in circles.' He looked at me with almost a taste of disdain! He said, 'All reasoning is reasoning in circles!' Then it hit like the proverbial 'ton of bricks.' Of course, that's how they all work.

So, whenever you read a history book and they're talking about certain things, or a book on archeology, or you're going to have treatise or commentary on Scripture and they make a point and quote a Scripture. You look at that Scripture and you say to yourself: That doesn't necessarily prove that! No it doesn't, but that professor or scholar is going on a certain assumption.

So, if you assume what he assumes, it certainly does mean that. In other words, if I assume one, two, three, I'm going to conclude A, B, C. If I assume 7, 8, 9 or 8, 9, 10, I'm going to conclude X, Y, Z; something totally different.

It's all in the assumptions. Here I was assuming that Jesus Christ was born in 4_{B.C.} so two years prior would be 6_{B.C.} But there was not a star of any kind like that in 6_{B.C.}

As we were looking at how we get to 5_{B.C.}? and not 4_{B.C.}? Well, if you remember we went to Luke 3 and we read that 'in the days of Herod the king, in the 15th year of Tiberius, came John the Baptist. It was pointed out to me, and I certainly agree that I didn't fully explain it, but Tiberius was

not the blood son of Augustus. He was the blood son of Livia, his wife. She was a bloodthirsty character in her own right. These people were something else when you really read their history.

In the 15th year of his reign he began co-ruling in 12_{A.D.} so that's 26_{A.D.} Then remember in John 2 we saw that Jesus' Passover—the first year of His ministry—He had a dispute with the Jews at the temple and they said, 'This temple has been 46 years in the building, so that was the 46th year of the temple. When was the temple started? *Herod began building it in the 18th year of his reign*—summer to summer—20_{B.C.}-19_{B.C.} Start counting 46 years and what do you come to? 26_{A.D.} The same, confirmation.

Jesus in the same year was about 30-years-old. He could have been a couple of months before or after, but He was very close to being 30-years-old. Start counting back: 26 and you come to 5_{B.C.} Why didn't we see that before? Why didn't I see that before? *I don't know!* Yes, I do know, I was on *assumption!* I assumed that the teaching that I received was correct, which was that the birth was in 4_{B.C.}

Now that I find that it's 5_{B.C.} I can go back two years to 7_{B.C.} So, let me now read to you a brief section from Edersheim's work:

The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah by Alfred Edersheim—section on this star:

...But *two years* before the birth of Christ, which, as we have calculated, took place in 747 A.U.C., or 5 before the Christian era...

which is the 747 from the founding of Rome, using Roman history

...or 7_{B.C.}, in which such a Star should appear in the East.

Did such a Star, then, really appear in the East seven years before the Christian era? Astronomically speaking and without any reference to controversy, there can be no doubt that the most remarkable conjunction of planet—that of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pices—which occurs once every 800 years...

I remember that because when I was a kid growing up in Illinois, I was a junior astronomer and once a month I would go the Museum of Natural History and the Aquarium and the Planetarium. Every December they had this, the stars lined up and talked about Johannes Kepler and calculation, and lo and behold, every 800-805 years this phenomena occurred. So, it definitely took place.

...did take place no less than three times in the year 747 A.C.U., or two years before the birth of Christ (May, October and December). This conjunction is admitted by all the astronomers. It was not only extraordinary, but presented the most brilliant spectacle in the night-sky, such as could not be attract the attention of all who watched the sidereal heavens, but especially of those who busied themselves with astrology.

Here was a massive light in the sky, and it would two years. Herod learned when the star appeared. 'When did you first see it?' *Two years before in 7_{B.C.}*

I'm willing to say, chances are—maybe not guaranteed—it was that conjunction of planets that was the star that they saw. What I cannot fully tell you though is this:

Matthew 2:7: "Then Herod secretly called for the Magi and ascertained from them the *exact* time of the appearing of *the* star.... [two years] ...And he sent them to Bethlehem... [v 9]: And after hearing the king, they departed; and behold, the star that they had seen in the east went in front of them, until it came and stood over *the house* where the little Child was" (vs 7-9).

I don't have a particular answer for that. It's possible—there are always two possibilities when you talk about star:

1. it could be a literal star
2. it could be an angel

Remember, angels are called *stars*. When God talks about certain stars He's referring to angels. I'm not prepared to say one way or the other. They're recording it as they saw and understood it—and when it says that it *stood above the house* what exactly that means I don't know.

If an angel went before them, that angel in the form of a bright light could appear before them and hover not far above that house. Am I going to say that for sure, no, I am not. I don't know. But most likely the star they saw in the East was this convergence of two planets in the sky. It's an amazing thing!

In part 5 we are going to look at the annunciation in Luke, and we're going to see the angelic hosts announced it to the shepherds in the fields. We're going to see how Mary reacted and pondered those things. How Joseph did it, and how Jesus said —when He was found in the temple after days at age 12—'Why are you asking Me this? Don't you know that I should be about My Father's business?' He went down and was subject them.

- What does that mean?

- Really being subject to them?
- God manifest in the flesh?
- How did Jesus learn to answer the questions of these doctors of the law?
- Who taught Him?
- Who gave Him this information?
- Who gave Him this knowledge?

Fascinating story! That's in the book of Luke 2 & 12.

Scriptural References:

- 1) Matthew 1:18-19
- 2) Deuteronomy 24:1
- 3) Matthew 1:20-23
- 4) Isaiah 7:14
- 5) Matthew 1:24-25
- 6) Matthew 2:1-16, 7-9

Scripture referenced, not quoted:

Deuteronomy 24:2-6

Also referenced: Book:

The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah by
Alfred Edersheim

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