



**The Scandal of Christmas  
An Examination of the Evidence for Christmas  
Isaiah 7:10-14 and others**

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The traditional events of the Christmas story are well-known to all Christians. The birth of Jesus includes three wise men bearing gifts, shepherds in the fields in mid-winter, a baby born in a stable and “no room in the inn.” These aspects of the account are firmly fixed in the popular mind. The question becomes: Is there a critical distinction to be made between the text and the traditional understanding of it? Have the centuries added meanings to our understanding of the text that are not there? (Bailey 2008, 25)

But the text in Matthew 2 simply says magi from the east, the Parthian Empire which Rome never defeated. It was two years later, at a house, in Bethlehem. The magi, who had traveled from the area



around Babylon most likely, came with protection, Parthian troops. And there could have been hundreds of magi, but just three gifts.

How did they know to be looking? Daniel 9:24-27

Daniel? Yes, Daniel. He was appointed head of the Babylonian School of Astrology by Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2:1-49.

Born in a stable? No, not quite.

In the winter? Hardly.

We usually don't think of the birth of Jesus Christ in terms of what the typical Jew living in Nazareth around 3 BC would see it as. Something rather scandalous.

We have 2000 years of traditions that we tend to view it through.

But when you get right down to it, the way and manner that Jesus came to this planet was not only counter cultural, but it was also scandalous to a Jew living at the time.

And one more thing, we were provided, by John in Revelation 12:1-7, a star chart of the time of the birth of Jesus Christ.

That star chart allows us to determine the year, day, month, and possibly a timeframe during the day as well when the birth took place. It was not in the winter.

Using the astronomical information provided in Revelation 12 regarding the position of the stars on the day of the birth of Messiah, we know that while observing the stars, the constellation Virgo would have a period of time annually, when observed from Israel, when one would look at the area of the sky the constellation would be in, the sun would cross the constellation at an area approximating mid-body, the area that would indicate pregnancy. This happens for about a 20 day period each year and would have been around August 27 to September 15 in 3BC. 3BC is the year based on information regarding the birth of John the Baptist and when the course of Abijah would have been serving in the Temple. The moon has to be located under the feet of Virgo which would narrow the window from 20 days to 90 minutes. 6:15 to 7:45 pm.

The apostle John said this heavenly relationship occurred at the time of Jesus' birth. And in 3 B.C.E. this exact combination of celestial factors happened just after sunset only on one day of the year. It was on September 11th. It could not have occurred at any other time of the year. Indeed, even one day before — on September 10 — the Moon would have been located above the Virgin's feet with the crescent not visible, while one day farther — on September 12 — the Moon had moved too far beyond the feet of the Virgin, at least 25 diameters of the Moon east of her feet. Thus, only one day applies. That day was just after sunset on September 11th, 3 B.C.E. (Martin 1976-2023)

Let's examine the facts of this case. We are not going all the way back to Genesis 3, where war was declared on Lucifer by God and a deliverer, the seed of the woman, was promised, but we will pick up the story when God made a promise to David.

David wanted to build the Temple, but God spoke to him through Nathan the prophet, there was this problem, "But God said to me, 'You may not build a house for my name, for you are a man of war and have shed blood.'" (1 Chronicles 28:3, ESV) Instead, God promised this.



1 Chronicles 17:11–14

““When your days are fulfilled that you must go to be with your fathers, then I will set up one of your descendants after you, who will be from your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build for Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father and he shall be My son; and I will not take My favor away from him, as I took it from him who was before you. But I will settle him in My house and in My kingdom forever, and his throne will be established forever.” ’ ” (NASB 2020)

The Davidic Covenant promised Messiah, who would be a descendant of David, will rule forever. Fast forward a few hundred years.

King Ahaz was one of the most serious losers of a King Judah ever had. He was totally worthless, totally godless, and never repented of his sin which included personally making human sacrifices (2 Kings 16:3). There was a war going on, one which he had a large part in causing to take place, and God was intent on protecting His people.

Isaiah 7:10–14

“Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, “Ask for a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, nor will I put the LORD to the test!” Then he said, “Listen now, house of David! Is it too trivial a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and she will name Him Immanuel.” (NASB 2020)

Ahaz blew it. So, Isaiah takes over. Isaiah starts with “Behold.”

We know this is going to be an important birth. There is an ancient formula for important birth announcements and because Isaiah understands “the solemnity and importance of the announcement which he was to make, Isaiah did take over as much of this ancient formula of announcement as suited his purpose. His reason for so doing was to attract attention to the announcement itself. If Ahaz and others who were present were at all familiar with this formula, they would immediately realize that an announcement of supreme importance was about to be made. Isaiah is not going to declare the birth of just any child, but of a significant Child.” (Young 1965, 285)

Later, Isaiah would provide a bit more prophetic information for us giving us the center of operations for the coming King as well as just who this King is.

Isaiah 9:1–7

“But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish. In earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He will make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them. You will multiply the nation, You will increase their joy; They will rejoice in Your presence As with the joy of harvest, As people rejoice when they divide the spoils. For You will break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian. For every boot of the marching warrior in the roar of battle, And cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire. For a Child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of armies will accomplish this.” (NASB 2020)

But did you catch it, this child would be born to a virgin. That means a miracle for this to take place. That means God will have to intervene in human affairs at the right time and place for this to happen.



We read that and take it at face value without thinking too much about the cultural impact a virgin birth would have.

This man who is coming, will be human, and will also be God.

Thanks to Isaiah, we now know the following:

- A virgin is to conceive and have a son.
- His name is to be God with us (Immanuel).
- He will minister in Galilee.
- He will be the government.
- He is God.
- He will rule forever.
- He is a descendant of David.
- Thanks to Micah 5:2, to be born in Bethlehem.

Before we get to the New Testament story of the birth there is something we need to be aware of concerning the genealogy of Jesus. We are provided two genealogies in the New Testament, one through Mary, the other through Joseph. Remember, Jesus must be of the line of David and virgin born as well.

There is also the little matter of the Davidic line, at least coming through Jeconiah (Jehoiachin, Coniah), being cursed by God.

First of all, we read this in Jeremiah 22:24 “As I live, declares the LORD, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet ring on my right hand, yet I would tear you off” (ESV)

That’s bad enough, but then there is this which appears to invalidate Jesus’ right to the throne. How can Messiah be of the lineage of David with this said.

Jeremiah 22:30

“Thus says the LORD: “Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah.”” (ESV)  
How is this accounted for?

He only ruled for three months, surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar and died in Babylon. None of his sons ever ruled Judah. Is that it, no, there is more. Possible, but there is more.

Jeconiah is in Joseph’s genealogy (Matthew 1:2-16), not Mary’s (Luke 3:23-38). This could be it. And then there is the promise to Zerubbabel, a descendant of Jeconiah, which appears to be a reversal of the signet ring removal by God in Jeremiah. Covered.

Haggai 2:23

““On that day,’ declares the LORD of armies, ‘I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you,’” declares the LORD of armies.” (NASB 2020)

There is also another possibility involving the daughters of Zelophehad, Moses and the topic of inheritance in Numbers 27 if Mary was born to a family with no sons. We do not know anything about her family though.

Why two genealogies? Matthew began his Gospel with the genealogy, presented the “Jechoniah problem,” and then solved it by means of the Virgin Birth. Matthew’s is the genealogy of Joseph. (Fruchtenbaum 1983, 12)



Luke is that of Mary. We get that from a function of the Greek language.

Every single name in Luke's genealogy has the definite article "the" in front of it except one: the name of Joseph. Someone reading the original language can tell by the missing "the" that this is not really Joseph's line, but the line of his wife, Mary. (Fruchtenbaum 1983, 12)

Fast forward to 4/3 BC, December/January timeframe, and we read the following.

Luke 1:26–38

"In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, a descendant of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. The angel came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled by his words and began to wonder about the meaning of this greeting. So the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God! Listen: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end." Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I have not been intimate with a man?" The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called the Son of God. And look, your relative Elizabeth has also become pregnant with a son in her old age—although she was called barren, she is now in her sixth month! For nothing will be impossible with God." So Mary said, "Yes, I am a servant of the Lord; let this happen to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her." (NET 2nd ed.)

Mary, in the end, submitted herself totally to the will and care of God because she had to be concerned for three things: first, that she would not be stoned to death which was the penalty under the Law; secondly, she had to trust that God would work out the reaction with the community; and thirdly, she had to trust that God would work out her relationship with Joseph, because Joseph would naturally assume the obvious; that Mary had been unfaithful. (Fruchtenbaum 1983, 25)

Talk about faith. Here is the picture, sometime in late December of 4 BC or early January of 3 BC, this young teenage girl is visited by an angel. Some background. In the world of Jewish life in Galilee, marriages were arranged. Mary is formally engaged to Joseph, who is older than her, and may have been for a year or so already. She is most likely around 13 years old. The engagement period was designed to be at least 9 months long.

The intent was to show to the prospective bridegroom, that his bride to be is chaste and pure. So here this young girl, has Gabriel appear to her and tells her, even though you have never been involved sexually with anyone, you're going to have a child. Not just any child, you are going to have the Messiah. He is the one who is to fulfill the prophecies that she had studied regarding the future King who will deliver His people and rule forever. Wow. That alone is a bit overwhelming. But notice the question she asks.

She accepts at face value that Gabriel is who he says he is. She was a bit perplexed initially at the greeting, but what kind of questions would you have if told this. Because she accepts this is "the Gabriel," the same angel who chatted with Daniel the Prophet, she accepts all he tells her and simply wants to know, "How." She understands that to have children, well it isn't something she can decide to do on her own without the assistance of anyone else in the picture. More specifically, Joseph her husband to be. She is a virgin, and she knows virgins simply do not have kids.



Gabriel tells her what the process is to be for her. Oh, and your childless cousin is pregnant too because “nothing will be impossible with God.” She asks no other questions, by faith she simply acknowledges she is the Lord’s to be used as He sees fit. And that is the end of the conversation.

Does she run off to see Joseph? No. Does she go and tell her parents? No. The text is silent. She goes to see her cousin, Elizabeth, down in the hill country of Judah.

To be sure, Mary bore the child wondrously, but she nevertheless did it “after the manner of women,” and such a time is one of anxiety, distress, and paradox. The angel was indeed a ministering spirit, but he was not a meddlesome spirit who went to the other young maidens in Israel and said: Do not scorn Mary, the extraordinary is happening to her. The angel went only to Mary, and no one could understand her. (Kierkegaard 1983, 65)

Mary, a young, engaged girl, has just been told she will become pregnant, and Joseph is not involved in the process. Mary has just had announced to her that she will have an unexpected pregnancy and now the clock is ticking. And she goes to see her cousin.

This is not a quick shot down to the hills around Jerusalem, this is a multiday trip, both directions, and most likely she will be gone for a month or more. This means when she does get back and visits with Joseph, the evidence of what Gabriel has announced to her may be evident.

Of course, the visit with Elizabeth goes well. Elizabeth, thanks to the Holy Spirit, knows everything. She receives a word of wisdom from the Holy Spirit at the moment she hears Mary’s voice. Mary is greeted with a song and with love and grace. They know who she is carrying. Yes, she is indeed now pregnant and has a wonderful visit, then she returns home to the Nazareth region of Galilee.

Of course, since a slight bump is now evident, she goes to see Joseph who most likely is angered by finding his bride to be is not as chaste as he thought.

“Joseph, who wants to avoid the public scandal to which this situation might lead, decides to make private arrangements for the engagement to be annulled.” (Campbell 2008, 24) The potential reality though, under the law, is much worse than a simple annulment for Mary.

Deuteronomy 22:23–24

“Suppose a man meets a young woman, a virgin who is engaged to be married, and he has sexual intercourse with her. If this happens within a town, you must take both of them to the gates of that town and stone them to death. The woman is guilty because she did not scream for help. The man must die because he violated another man’s wife. In this way, you will purge this evil from among you.” (NLT)

Joseph loves Mary, he is disappointed, angry, but he is working through what to do and he is willing to break the law to do it.

The Greek word, here translated “he considered” (*enthymēomai*) has two meanings. To be sure, one of them is “he considered/pondered.” But a second meaning is “he became angry.” That is, he became very upset. Isn’t anger the natural emotion for him to have felt? (Bailey 2008, 44-45)

Matthew 1:18–25

“This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your



wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet: "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'" When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus." (NLT)

But here is the thing, she is already pregnant and just like today, people start counting and wondering.

Mary was not unmarried when Jesus was born, but anyone who could count knew that she was unmarried when he was conceived. To make things worse, she denied that Joseph was his father. Nazareth was a small town, and Galilee was a closely interconnected group of similar small towns, so this scandal of Jesus' birth would follow him wherever he preached. (Instone-Brewer 2006, 21)

Joseph, being a man of faith, did exactly as he was instructed. He went and that next morning, based on the text, took her as his wife.

But the community, by now, knew. Mary was pregnant and Joseph had nothing to do with it. Scandal. But Joseph is a man of faith and for the next few months, he endures the scorn of family and community about his wife.

Then the worse possible thing could happen, Caesar, for some reason, calls for a census.

Luke 2:1-7

"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." (ESV)

Why a census? Why now? Probably tax revenue. There was peace throughout the empire at this point and Augustus wanted to maximize the opportunity for the costs of the empire to be covered.

There was some precedent for the man and woman to both register, but then again, it may have also been a decision of Joseph's even at this late point in the pregnancy, to take Mary with him.

He had been taking heat from family and others about Mary for several months now. There may have also been threats made to enforce the law which he had decided not to pursue.

Now he must travel to Bethlehem down south to enroll for the census, and this might be a good time to take her as well and cut the cord with Nazareth for a while.

In the text, the time spent in Nazareth prior to traveling south is not specified. In addition, we do not know how long they were in Bethlehem before it was time for Jesus to be born. We tend to think that Joseph had to take what he could find since Mary delivered the same day she arrived. That may not be the case, the text is silent. Oh, and one more thing, the text never says she arrived riding on a donkey either.

Many of the traditions we think about surrounding the birth of Jesus come to us from a non-biblical source. "The source of this misinterpretation stems from approximately two hundred years after the birth of Jesus, when an anonymous Christian wrote an expanded account of the birth of Jesus that has



survived and is called The Protevangelium of James. James had nothing to do with it. The author was not a Jew and did not understand Palestinian geography or Jewish tradition. In that period many wrote books claiming famous people as the authors.” (Bailey 2008, 27)

Most of us have never heard of this book, but we have been influenced by it.

Why did Joseph take Mary with him to Bethlehem for the registration? The easiest explanation is that he was unsure what might happen to her if he left her in Nazareth without his presence to protect her. It behooves us to see Joseph as a hero of the story without whose courage and understanding of the prophets there would have been no Christmas story to tell. (Bailey 2008, 46)

So, Mary who is pregnant, and Joseph head south.

This is not a short trip. It will take days of travel just to get there. There may be a group from Nazareth traveling there together, but that might not be the wisest thing to for them to do so it is possible they left on their own. At the very least, they were unable to keep up with the group because when they do arrive, guest quarters are at a premium.

Bethlehem is a back water on a minor road running south out of Jerusalem into the hill country of Judea. Yes, Mary was just here a few months earlier at Elizabeth’s home. To get to Bethlehem, you had to want to go there to get there, you simply did not pass through.

It wasn’t on the main drag to anyplace at all. The word Luke uses here is not the word he uses in Luke 10:34 when he talks about the Inn the Samaritan is left in. That word is pandocheion, here Doctor Luke uses the word kataluma. Elsewhere when he uses this word, it is for a guest room, like in Luke 22:11. So here is where we wind up departing from tradition. There was no room in the guest room, not the inn. There was no inn since Bethlehem was not big enough to have one. The typical house in Bethlehem was either two rooms or one room with a place to stay on the roof. You would enter the house by passing through an area in the house where livestock was kept overnight, step up and then into the house proper. One large room for cooking, sleeping and living. Then in the back of the house, would be another room, that would be for guests. In the alternative, it would be on the roof. The main room was a “family room” where the entire family cooked, ate, slept and lived. The end of the room next to the door, was either a few feet lower than the rest of the floor or blocked off with heavy timbers. Each night into that designated area, the family cow, donkey and a few sheep would be driven. And every morning those same animals were taken out and tied up in the courtyard of the house. (Bailey 2008, 28-29)

Usually there were a couple of mangers at the end as well. This would all be cleaned out each morning. Today, it would be more along the lines of a garage. I remember traveling as a kid and there was not enough room in the house for all of us, so I got to sleep in the garage in my sleeping bag.

Our traditions tell us Jesus was born in a barn like atmosphere, the reality, He was born in the front portion of a single room house adjacent to where the livestock was.

After birth, He was wrapped in cloths, which was not unusual at all for folks of the time and placed into one of the mangers there at the front of the home. Because there was no room in the guest room.

Was it just Mary with Joseph serving as midwife for the birth. Possibly, but more likely the village midwife came in and assisted, or the woman of the house they were staying in helped.

This is also where the shepherds went to as well to see the newly announced Messiah.





So, circumstances surrounding the census required Joseph to be in Bethlehem, his town of origin. He brought Mary with him, we do not know if she also had to register, or he brought her to protect her. The major thing, Messiah must be born in Bethlehem, and this was used by the Lord to get them there.

The scandal of this pregnancy, and Joseph needing to protect his wife from overly zealous synagogue members may also be playing into this. He faithfully followed the instructions given to him by the angel to take her as his wife and he embraced the role.

The scandal of the virgin birth continued to follow Jesus all of His life. The leadership of the Temple dredged this up into conversation with Jesus as He was in the process of telling them they were not following God but following Satan (John 8:41-44).

But for Mary and Joseph, they provide the ultimate example for us of what it means to be equally yoked in marriage. Mary asked only one question, Joseph asked none and simply acted on faith. They both loved, honored and served God and acted on their faith.

Following Jesus today is still scandalous. Just as the virgin birth was countercultural, so is being a Christian in today's culture. We are celebrating the coming of our King to this planet and His birth, His incarnation as a man in order to save us. How can you take advantage of that? Simple, by acting on the work that He achieved when He went to the cross, redeeming mankind, the reason He came here in the first place.

Romans 3:21–24

“But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.” (NLT)

Romans 10:9–13

“If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.” Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. For “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.”” (NLT)

#### **ABC's of Salvation**

- A. Acknowledge that you are a sinner, tell Him that.
- B. Believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sin and that He rose from the dead.
- C. Confess that Jesus is Lord. Tell someone about what you have done.



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