

# THREE MEDITATIONS ON THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST

By Michael Smith  
From the book, *Walking With Jesus*, Chapter 8

*Please read Matthew 1:18–25 and Luke 2:1–20*

It is true we don't know the exact date of Jesus' birth; some say it may have been in September because the shepherds still kept their sheep out at night at that time of the year, while at the end of December it usually became too cold. Also, the beginning of the Jewish New Year fell in September, and just as the new year can mean a new start likewise the birth of Jesus also started a new era for all mankind, with dates marked B.C. standing for 'Before Christ.'

However, sometime between the latter part of the third century and the first part of the fourth century, it was decided by the Roman Catholic Church that December 25th would mark the date of Jesus' birth. This date was chosen for several reasons, one of which was to coincide with the shortest, darkest days of the year; the idea being that with the birth of Jesus Christ the true light had at last come, and that light would shine brightly in the dark sinful world of men's hearts from then on, thus showing forth God's loving care for man and the beginning of His saving grace for everyone who would accept it. As such it was intended to replace the old pagan winter festival of pre-Christian times. It seemed God had started something brand new with the birth of Jesus Christ.

## God Did A New Thing

At the heart of the Nativity is the virgin birth, which teaches that Jesus was conceived in the womb of a young Jewish virgin called Mary by God the Holy Spirit, *not* by a human father, and the question is, why did God need to do this? Man born of man has a fallen nature with a bias to sin and falls well short of God's perfect standard every time. This is more serious than at first it would seem, because our sinful, self-centred nature cuts us off from a perfect God, and shuts the door to any fellowship with Him both here and in eternity.

God originally created us to have constant fellowship with Him, but when man sinned the fellowship was lost, and in order for it to be restored a man *without* a fallen nature had to be born and live a perfect, sinless, life thereby re-opening the way back into heavenly fellowship with God the Father.

The trouble was that everyone born normally had a sinful, self-centred nature. So, God Himself, in Jesus Christ, became human - being born as a baby and growing up to live the perfect life that God wanted us all to live. The Gospel teaches us that we *can't* live a perfect life in our own strength, but that God Himself comes down from Heaven and lifts us up through His Holy Spirit enabling us to live a life pleasing to Him. For this to come about Jesus had to die on a cruel cross, standing in the place of judgement where we should have been, and there He replaced our sinful, fallen, self-centred nature, burying it by His death, while freely giving us His perfect, righteous, godly, nature. The good news is that this is available for everyone who will accept it by faith, even today. No wonder angels rejoiced as they saw God do for us what we could never do for ourselves.

Two of the first people to realise that God was starting something new were Mary and the man to whom she was betrothed, Joseph. They had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, in order to register as descendants of the late King David - a very long journey for someone about to give birth. Mary rode on a donkey as it wasn't possible for her to walk all that way on foot; even so, it must still have been a very slow and uncomfortable journey. By the time they eventually reached Bethlehem everyone else had already arrived and every room was fully occupied, and so, for the sake of privacy, the only place that could be found away from the crowds was a stable where other travellers had left their donkeys. There Mary went into labour without disturbing everyone else and Jesus, the long-awaited Saviour of mankind, was born in a lowly cattle shed.

After the crowds had returned home to their villages and their daily work, Matthew tells us that Mary, Joseph and the Lord Jesus were able to move into a house while Mary recovered. Holy angels rejoiced to see God's long-awaited plan of salvation unfold for man and some of them appeared to some shepherds looking after their sheep near to Bethlehem. God was breaking into time from eternity in a new way, and such a mighty miracle had to be joyously shared with those nearby.

## **The Wise Men**

This good news was also shared with some astrologers many hundreds of miles away. God created a bright new star that pronounced to all, far and wide, that He was visiting earth. It took months for the astrologers to travel all the way to Bethlehem, but they had seen God's sign in the sky - the bright new star - and brought gifts that showed they understood what God was saying.

In those days astrologers followed the occult, worshipping the devil in various ways, but these astrologers showed by their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh that they had insight into who Jesus really was. Gold was for a king and showed they knew Jesus was a King, which in turn greatly troubled the local king, called Herod. Frankincense was used in worship, and showed they realised Jesus was the long-awaited God, King and Messiah, and was someone to be worshipped. The special star had already told them that. Myrrh showed their deep insight, as it was used for burial of the dead.

The astrologers also demonstrated how important the event was for them: although they were probably only with Jesus for a short time, they must have been away from their homes and loved ones for over a year at great expense to themselves. By turning away from the occult, they acknowledged Jesus Christ as the true God, King and Saviour. How wonderful! These men had deep insight and wisdom and are rightly called wise men. Lastly the star was God's mighty advertisement in the sky telling anyone with insight that He had become a Man, in order to be mankind's all-conquering Saviour of the world.

## **Born to Die**

Even at His birth the long shadow of the cross loomed over Jesus, showing how He would save mankind, defeat the devil and bring all who are willing back to His Father. On the cross Jesus took all our sins and covered them with His precious blood in order to forgive us. He also defeated the devil and his evil ways which held man in bondage and death.

We must never forget that had Jesus not been born in Bethlehem, lived, and died as a man on Calvary, and later been resurrected there would have been no Gospels of good news; in fact, no New Testament. Without Jesus, there would still be no access to the Father, because uncleansed and unforgiven our sins would still keep us from His pure holiness. There would certainly be no way at all to obtain eternal life in Heaven. The Holy Spirit, whose work it is to help, bless and guide us, could not have been poured out, so we would have no way of knowing God's presence in this life. The apostles and now-famous names of the New Testament and many great heroes of the church would be nobodies. Indeed, the church itself and church life would be non-existent.

Mercifully, the long-awaited divine Messiah, Jesus Christ, did come and join Himself to man. No wonder an army of His angels rejoiced and shared their joy with some country folk looking after their sheep, who in turn went to find and worship the newborn Saviour of the world in a humble stable. Even the name 'Emmanuel' means God Himself is with us and for us, not just on December 25th, but every minute of every day of every year.

At the birth of Jesus Christ, God gave us His very best, and in return we need to do likewise.