

# **Diamonds in the Dust 10**

## **Bethlehem and Jesus' Earthly Beginnings**

*Oh little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth, the everlasting light  
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.*

**What are key elements of the story of Jesus's earthly birth?**

- o Bethlehem
- o Shepherds
- o Kings/Wise Men/Magi
  - o How many?
  - o Names? Trad. --Gaspar (or Caspar), Melchior, and Balthasar
- o Mary, Joseph
- o Animals
  - o Sheep
  - o Oxen
  - o Donkey
  - o Camel
- o Manger
- o Stable
- o Inn and Innkeeper?
- o Census
- o Herod the Great
- o Quirinius, Governor of Syira
- o Anna
- o Simeon
- o Egypt
- o Death of the Innocents
- o Star
- o Naming/Dedication in the Temple in Jerusalem

## Bethlehem Today:



West Bank = Palestinian = Arab = Largely Muslim, but not exclusively.

- o Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Jerusalem have largest groups of Christians in Israel/Palestine. Mainly *Arab* Christians.
  - Eastern Orthodox Catholic denominations -- Greek, Syrian, Armenian, Russian -- plus smaller Roman Catholic populations, mainly Clergy

*in 2017 47,000 Palestinian Christians were living in Palestine – the Occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. Ninety-eight percent of Palestine's Christians live in the West Bank; a tiny Christian community of 1,100 people, live in the besieged Gaza Strip.*

<https://www.twn.my/title2/resurgence/2019/341-342/human1.htm>

Population Today – Thriving – 2007 = 25,000

Economy Today: Tourism. Also known for bridal embroidery and mother of pearl carving.

To get to Bethlehem today , you must pass through a check point in the dividing wall, get a Palestinian Driver and guide.



Is it a border wall? A fence? A “defense barrier”

From *60 Minutes*, Bob Simon, “Christians in the Holy Land:”

*“The wall was built to stop Palestinian terrorists from getting into Israel. And it’s worked. Terrorism has gone down 90 percent. At the same time, the wall completely surrounds Bethlehem, turning the “little town” where Christ was born into what its residents call “an open air prison.”*

Wall doesn't completely surround Bethlehem, but it cuts Bethlehem off on three sides.

## Why Born in Bethlehem?

- o Messiah to be descended from David, whose throne was promised to be father of eternal monarchy
  - o Joseph's genealogy links him to David
  - o Two Cities of David: Jerusalem and Bethlehem

*But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,  
who are one of the little clans of Judah,  
from you shall come forth for me  
one who is to rule in Israel,  
whose origin is from of old,  
from ancient days.*

Micah 5:2

## Bethlehem before Jesus

- o Ruth and Boaz
- o David
- o 1000 years with nothing

## Bethlehem at Jesus Birth

- Population – 300 to 1000 based on archeology
- Economy – agriculture (sheep)
- Significance – Largely forgotten. Claim to fame was 1000 years earlier.

## Was Jesus *really* born in Bethlehem?

- Known as Jesus of Nazareth, not Jesus of Bethlehem
- Jesus never goes back to Bethlehem.

## Jeff's theory – Census is an unnecessary cover story:

- Mary discovers pregnancy, they keep it secret and leave before she “shows”, goes to Bethlehem to live with Joseph's relatives; he introduces Mary to them as his wife. They live in Bethlehem for 3 months before birth and about 2 years after birth. Then they escape to Egypt and live there until after Herod's death in c. 4 BC. They return to Nazareth with a 3 year old as a married couple. At some point on their journey they marry in a small ceremony.

## When was Jesus Born?

Clues:

1. Herod the Great was still alive.
  - o Jesus was born 2 years before Herod's death (by dating of the massacre in Bethlehem)
  - o Herod Born c. 72 BCE; Died 4 BCE (Schürer) or 1 BCE (Filmer) or 1 AD (Marvin)
    - Points to 6 BC, 3 BC, or 1 BC
  
2. Census:
  - o Quirinius (Roman) Governor of Syria
    - o Census for taxation purposes: 6AD
      - censuses were forbidden under Jewish law
        - the census did trigger the revolt of Judas of Galilee and the formation of the party of the Zealots, according to Josephus
    - o Could there have been another census? Yes. But unlikely.
    - o Could it have been a later writer trying to make sense of why Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem instead of Nazareth at that time?
  
3. "Star" or Astral Convergence c. 2 years after Jesus's birth
  - o summer of 3 BC, Jupiter and Venus met and continued their dance over most of the next year before finally appearing to merge into a single star in June.
  - o This would point to a birth of Christ around 5 BC

Summary: Jesus was most likely born between 6 BCE and 3 BCE

—Note: there is no year Zero: 1 BC is its equivalent. After 1 BC comes 1 AD

## Julian calendar

Conventions and abbreviations:

BC = Before Christ

AD = Anno Domini (Year of our Lord)

BCE = Before the Common Era

CE = Common Era

Jewish people do not keep time based on Jesus' birth. For them 2021 is the year 5781.

The Romans marked time from the founding of Rome. Thus, "Year 0" to the Romans is 753 BC.

### **What season of the year was Jesus born?**

- When are shepherds in the fields keeping watch by night?
  - shepherds in the fields March through September (warm enough).
  - December -- flocks are usually brought into shelter no later than the middle of October.

"Fields" is a technical term:

- a narrow mountainous strip in the center of the country, around Jerusalem and Bethlehem.
- where farmers raised their barley, wheat and other grains.
  - The wheat was typically harvested in late June and July,
    - After the wheat had been completely harvested, there was a two week period where the poor people could come in and glean the fields. (see Leviticus 19:9-10, Leviticus 23:22, and the story of Ruth).
  - Only after gleaning would shepherds be allowed into the fields to eat whatever else remained.
    - middle of August until late September or mid October

Reference: <https://acts242study.com/shepherds-in-the-field/>

**"In the Days of Herod the King" -- Matthew 2 – The Connection and Contrast between Herod and Jesus**

- o Proximity of the Herodian/Herodium to Bethlehem (and Jerusalem)





*Matthew 17:20 -- He replied, "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."*

### **Murder of the Innocents -- Matthew 2:1-18**

True? Not mentioned by Josephus the Jewish historian who notes other Herodian massacres.

- Story concocted to compare Herod to Pharaoh?
- Concocted to build Messiah's reputation by fulfilling prophecy  
"Out of Egypt I have called my son"?

Is this likely behavior for Herod the Great, "King of Kings"? Would he order the death of children in order to remove any threat to his legacy?

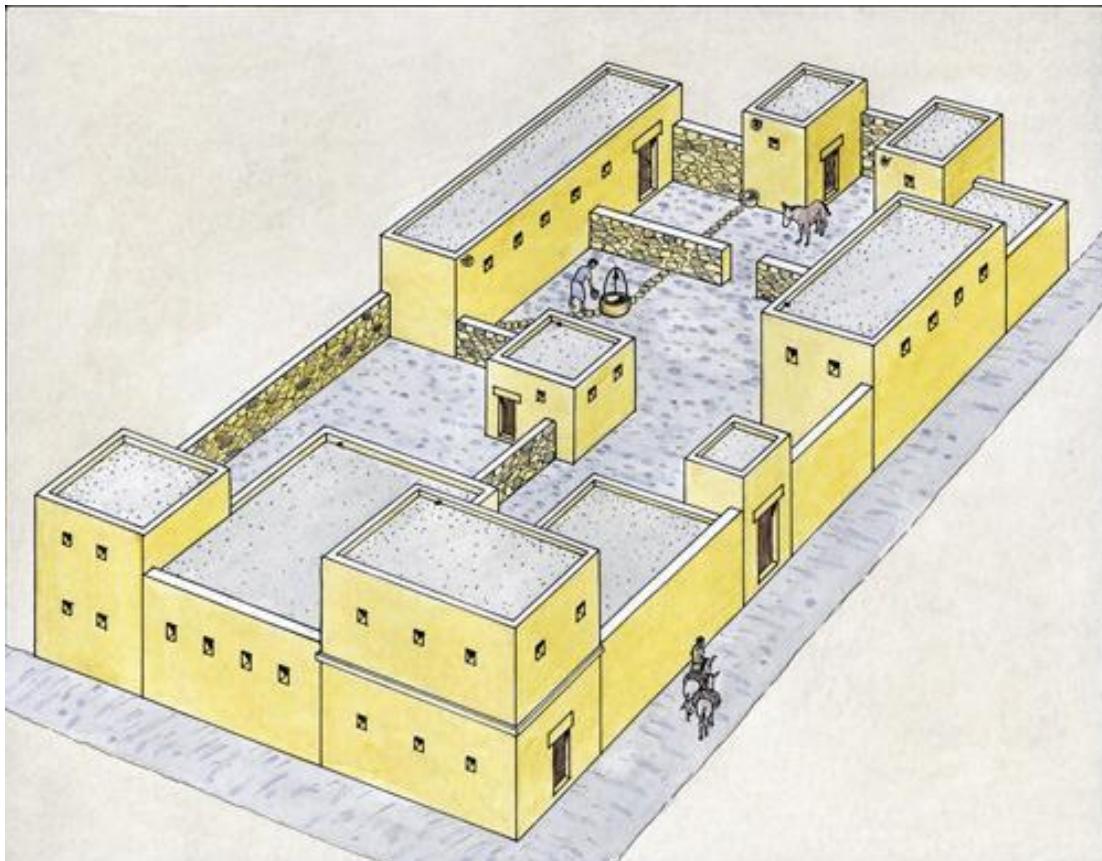
- murdered his favorite wife Mariamne, her two sons, her brother, her grandfather, and her mother.
- Why not kill babies he had never met
  - In a village of 300-1000, the number of babies under the age of two would be only between seven and twenty.

## No Room at the Inn?

*“And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7).*

“Inn” = Greek *kataluma* = “guest room,” not a commercial inn, but a spare room in a private home.

- o Joseph and Mary had not just arrived in Bethlehem; they weren’t scrambling.
- o Joseph likely had relatives to stay with in his hometown.
- o Inns at that time did not have a good reputation and Mary would have wanted privacy
- o Would have been surrounded by the women of the village rather than oxen and sheep.



If Bethlehem were a larger village, this would have been the kind of Inn compound to expect, with many rooms and many buildings around a protected courtyard.

More likely, the “inn” was a guest room or area connected to a cave dwelling that also accommodated animals at one time or another.



The typical entrance to a cave home is a stone doorway, which extends into the soft, clay-like rock

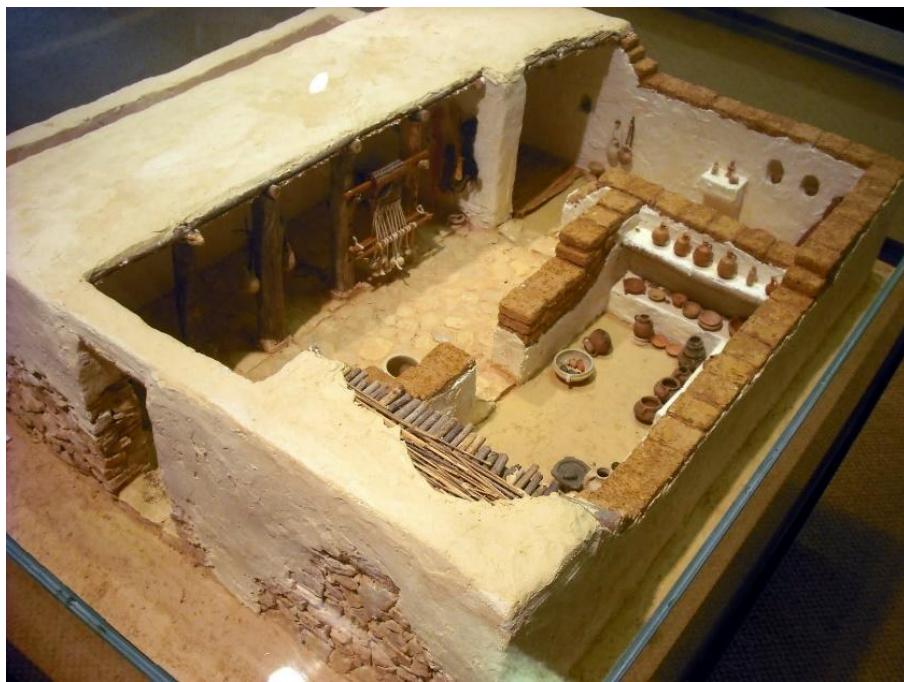




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In cave dwellings, there is no proper kitchen and no table, so the food is prepared and eaten directly on the ground. Saheer Hamamdi prepares dawali, a traditional Palestinian dish, with her sister-in-law.

An above-ground house-barn – Peasant homes often included shelter for animals





**Manger**

o Stone



**Manger**



Ossuary

Carolyn Kenworthy Poem

### **Shepherds**

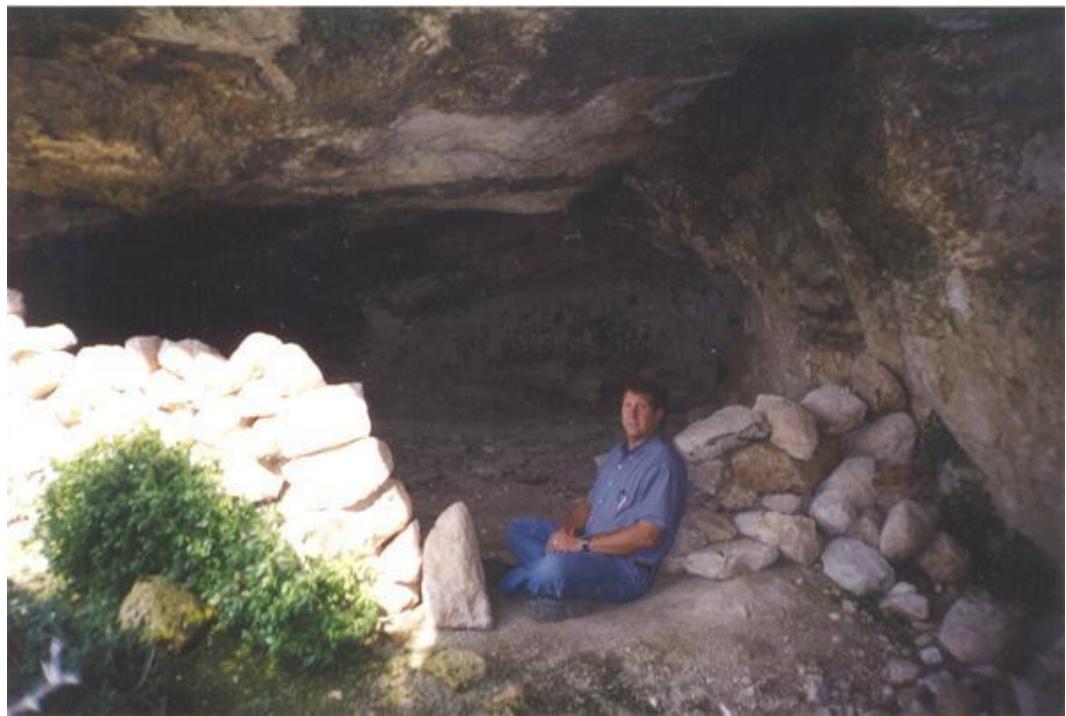
- Children
- Girls
- Not reliable



Shepherd's Field Outside Bethlehem



Rock Sheepfold -- Judea



Cave Sheepfold -- Israel

## The Church of the Nativity Today



Entrance plaza – Church of the Nativity

- o Built to be easily defended, like a fortress
  - o Note the Small entrance



Nave (Sanctuary) Church of the Nativity built in 4<sup>th</sup> Century



Underground Grotto or Cave; Entrance requires a person to bow down



The Spot