

THE MOST IMPORTANT PLACE ON EARTH (Bethlehem of Judea)

Matthew 2:1-2

*Now after Jesus was born in **Bethlehem of Judea** in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is **He who has been born King** of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."*

There are many significant statements in this Christmas passage with hidden treasures and precious gems of revelation from which we can learn. I wonder if you can see them.

1. THE FIRST IS: JESUS WAS BORN IN A SPECIFIC PLACE - 'BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA'.

Why does it state Bethlehem *OF JUDEA*?

There was another Bethlehem in Israel in the north about 15 kilometres from Nazareth where Joseph and Mary lived.

SLIDE THERE ARE TWO BETHLEHEMS

(1) Bethlehem of Galilee

(2) Bethlehem of Judea

Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea not Bethlehem of Galilee.

SLIDE IN THE RIGHT PLACE JESUS IS CENTRAL AND PRESENT

SO WHAT WAS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO BETHLEHEMS?

JESUS HIMSELF IS THE DIFFERENCE.

Jesus was Present and central in Bethlehem in Judea ...

He wasn't in Bethlehem in the north.

*Our church faith statement is simple, 'We are Grace Based and **Christ Focused**'.*

SLIDE

- IF JESUS IS NOT THE CENTRE ... YOU'RE IN THE WRONG PLACE, **EVEN IF IT HAS THE RIGHT NAME.**
- IF JESUS IS THE CENTRE OF ANY PLACE ... IT IS THE RIGHT PLACE.

THESE TWO TOWNS WERE CALLED BY THE SAME NAME, BUT ONE HAD JESUS CHRIST ALIVE AT ITS CENTRE ... THE OTHER DID NOT.

THERE IS ALWAYS AN ALTERNATIVE TO GOD'S CHOSEN PLACE.

IT HAD THE SAME NAME BUT IT DIDN'T HAVE THE SAME GRACE AND BLESSING.

Just like today:

THERE ARE MANY PLACES CALLED 'CHURCH' ALL CALLED BY THE SAME TITLE BUT LIKE THE TWO BETHLEHEMS, MANY AREN'T BUILT AROUND JESUS AND DON'T MANIFEST HIS PRESENCE.

- *We have 'The Church of Scientology'. It's called a church (another Bethlehem).*
- *There are 10 'Spiritualist Churches' in Queensland, all called 'CHURCH' (another Bethlehem).*

But like this 'BETHLEHEM IN THE NORTH' there is always one major thing missing.
JESUS HIMSELF IS NOT CENTRAL AND PRESENT.

Because people are called Christian and go to church, doesn't mean they have what you have.

I heard this week on Mastermind, a question that said, 'Which Christian organisation has the magazine called, 'Watchtower'. That's the Jehovah's Witnesses, and it's called Christian.

The Church at Laodicea was a Pentecostal church - they were wealthy and had everything ... but Jesus was not there ...

He was outside knocking ... trying to get in. (Revelation 3:20)

'King of Glory, fill this place ... We just wanna be with You' (- song I saw yesterday).

IN ALL PLACES WE GO WE MUST ASK, 'IS JESUS HIMSELF CENTRAL AND PRESENT?'
BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA WAS SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE JESUS WAS CENTRAL AND PRESENT IN IT.

2. IN THE RIGHT PLACE JESUS IS KING

In Bethlehem of Judea, Jesus was not only just present ... but present as KING

Matthew 2:2 SLIDE

... "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

People in the Bethlehem from the south WORSHIP THE KING.

PEOPLE FROM THE BETHLEHEM IN THE NORTH DON'T BOW THE KNEE TO JESUS THE KING, BECAUSE THE KING ISN'T THERE.

PEOPLE FROM THE BETHLEHEM IN THE NORTH DO OTHER RELIGIOUS THINGS ...

Knights Templar ... believed that Bethlehem in the north was where Jesus was born and they built a temple there.

- **People from the Bethlehem in the north** ... pray ... oh yes, they pray ...
... 'Lord, please forgive us ...'
They are conscious of their own sin ... not His righteousness because THE 'KING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS' IS NOT THERE.
- **People from the Bethlehem in the north** try to get God to serve them ...
... 'Lord I need this ... I need that ... Lord do this for us ...'
THAT'S BECAUSE THEY DO NOT BOW THEIR KNEE TO THE KING.

Isaiah 32:1

Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule with justice.

SLIDE IN THE RIGHT PLACE PEOPLE WORSHIP THE KING SLIDE 2

- **People from the Bethlehem in the north** ... DON'T WORSHIP THE KING.
*They sing praise songs ... Many about striving to get God's blessing ...
... to enter His presence ... to get closer to God to get things from Him ...*

They create a hype ... and you can get a buzz ... there might even be manifestations ... gold dust ... or even healings (God is gracious to all people in every place).

IN BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA ... THE WISE MEN BOWED & WORSHIPPED THE KING (Matt 2:2)

Bethlehem of Judea had the King in it.

JESUS WAS BORN KING ... BUT KING OF WHAT?

More than King of Judea ... More than King of the Jews (as the wise men stated).

HE IS THE KING OF GLORY

Psalm 24:9-10

*Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors!
And the King of glory shall come in. ¹⁰ Who is this King of glory?
The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah*

3. THIS PLACE OF BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA WAS CHOSEN BY GOD HUNDREDS OF YEARS BEFORE

IT WAS FORETOLD BY THE PROPHETS THAT JESUS THE MESSIAH WOULD BE BORN IN BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA.

Matthew 2:6 SLIDE

'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.' (Quote from Micah 5:2)
Recorded 700 years before the birth of Jesus

Genesis 49:10 NLT SLIDE

The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from his descendants, until the coming of the one to whom it belongs, the one whom all nations will honour.

JESUS HIMSELF STATED IT

John 7:42 Berean Study Bible SLIDE

Doesn't the Scripture say that the Christ will come from the line of David and from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?

THIS PLACE OF BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA WAS BUILT ON THE HERITAGE OF LIVES

Many great men and women of Faith had established the truth of this important place.

IT WAS IN THIS PLACE THAT ANOTHER GREAT KING WAS BORN AND ANOINTED 1000 YEARS BEFORE. THAT WAS KING DAVID (1 Samuel 16:4-13), THE SON OF JESSE, THE SON OF OBED, THE SON OF RUTH AND BOAZ, AND THEY ALSO LIVED RIGHT HERE IN BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA.

1 Samuel 17:12

Now David was the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehem Judah, whose name was Jesse ...

Isaiah 11:1

*And there shall come forth a rod out of **the stem of Jesse**, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.*

**JESUS WAS BORN ON THE FOUNDATION OF LIVES WHO HAD LIVED OVER MANY YEARS ...
BETHLEHEM WAS CHOSEN BY GOD, SET APART AND SACRED - THE MOST IMPORTANT
PLACE ON EARTH!**

4. GOD CALLED JOSEPH TO THIS SACRED ... SIGNIFICANT PLACE

Jesus' legal line is traced through Joseph ... the blood line is traced through Mary. It was because of Joseph's ancestry in King David that Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem when Jesus was born, at the time of *the census ("enrolment")*: *In the right place ... in the right lineage.*

Luke 2:1-7 RSV

*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrolment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And **Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city 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 enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. 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.***

SO, GOD ARRANGED AN INCONVENIENT CIRCUMSTANCE TO BRING JOSEPH AND MARY TO BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA ...

SLIDE

Joseph and Mary had to travel on foot about 150km from Nazareth in the north where they lived, to register in this Bethlehem of Judea. (It is about 9.6km south of Jerusalem). So Joseph took his heavily pregnant fiancé who was about to give birth to THIS PLACE – BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA.

The journey would have been gruelling at its best. It would have been slow ... arduous and could have taken them about 8 days. It is suggested that it would have been very cold ... and very dangerous. There were bears and lions in the forests they passed and thieves and murders. They would have also had to bring provisions with them like water ... bread ... oil etc as well as blankets for sleeping outside.

So they needed to carry with them all these provisions and would have needed at least one donkey ... maybe two. In those days, the donkey was a common mode of transport for a Jew who could afford it. See (Luke 10:34, John 12:14-15)

- **WHY WASN'T THE CENSUS 12 MONTHS BEFORE?**

Joseph and Mary could have travelled there a lot easier and got back in time to conceive and give birth in Nazareth their home town.

BUT THEN JESUS WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN BORN IN BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA.

- **WHY WASN'T THE CENSUS 12 MONTHS AFTER JESUS WAS BORN?**

They could have left Jesus with friends and gone in greater ease.

BUT THEN JESUS WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN BORN IN BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA.

GOD ARRANGED THE CENSUS THROUGH CAESAR AUGUSTUS RIGHT AT THE TIME WHEN MARY WAS DUE TO GIVE BIRTH ... SO THAT RIGHT AT THAT TIME MARY WOULD GIVE BIRTH IN EXACTLY THE RIGHT PLACE, THE PLACE OF JESUS ANCESTRY AND FULFILL MANY PROPHEESIES.

IT WAS CERTAINLY INCONVENIENT ...

GOD'S WILL IS NOT ALWAYS CONVENIENT FOR US ...

BUT HIS GRACE IS ALWAYS THERE TO CARRY US THROUGH.

SLIDE GOD ARRANGED ANOTHER INCONVENIENT JOURNEY FOR ISRAEL YEARS BEFORE.

Look at the way God led Israel through the wilderness and fed them manna ...

It wasn't a gourmet meal every night, but the presence of God was with them all the way.

Remember Moses said, 'I will not go unless your presence goes with me' (Exodus 33:15).

So, the pillar of fire by day and the cloud by night was both their protection from heat and cold and their assurance and comfort. It was HIS presence ... HIS manifest Glory.

SLIDE The fire over the tabernacle in the wilderness comparable to God's glory in the star over Bethlehem.

GOD WILL ALWAYS GIVE US HIS GRACE TO DO WHAT HE CALLS US TO DO.

5. IN THIS PLACE THERE WAS DIVINE REVELATION OF THE KING OF GLORY

Matthew 2:9-11 **SLIDE**

*When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, **the star** which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and **stood over where the young Child was.** ¹⁰ When **they saw the star**, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. ¹¹ And when they had come into the house, **they saw the young Child** with Mary His mother, and fell down **and worshiped Him.** And when they had opened their treasures, **they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.***

SLIDE THE STAR NOT ONLY REVEALED WHERE THE KING WAS ...

THE STAR ALSO REVEALED *WHO* THE KING WAS!

ANY REVELATION FROM GOD ... WILL ALWAYS REVEAL JESUS THE KING.

BEWARE SUPERNATURAL PHENOMENA THAT DON'T REVEAL JESUS AS KING
eg 'Our Lady of Lourdes' ... There was no mention of Jesus in that.

THE 3 GIFTS OF REVELATION

The 3 gifts the wise men brought under the star revealed more of who this New-born Son of God was.

- **GOLD (Divinity):** He was divine: God of very God ... He was pure and holy.
- **FRANKINCENSE (Worship):** He would lead a life of pure worship to the Father. His life was worship.
- **MYRRH (Suffering)** He would be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief until He would suffer the sin of the world and the judgement of God on the Cross.

UNDER THE STAR OF REVELATION, THESE THREE (PRE-PURCHASED) GIFTS REVEALED WHO THIS AMAZING MESSIAH WAS.