

The Shepherd in Israel



Mike

Scriptures:

Micah 5:2

Luke 2:8

John 1:14

During this month we have been looking at different aspects of following our Great Shepherd, I want to dwell for a minute on the incredible events that surround the Nativity of our Lord and Saviour. The story that invites us into the birth of the Everlasting Father from beyond the beginning who made a portion of Himself visible by appearing in human flesh.

In the man-child born in Israel, we inherited the tangible evidence of the unsearchable Father, the clearest picture we have of the Father's tender love. A massive concept to grasp, that 2000 years ago the Shepherd of Israel looked out upon us through the eyes of Jesus Christ and spoke to us face to Face.

It was the prophet Micah who prophesied where he would be born.

Micah 5:2 *But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*

We celebrate the birth of Jesus at the end of December, "it's traditional", but are we sure that this is the correct time for such a significant event or should we consider that a more appropriate time exists?

Before the crucifixion Jesus took His disciples to the mount of Olives and He issued a warning, *"But woe to them that are with child and them that give suck in those days."* He said pray that your flight be not in winter or on the Sabbath (Matthew 24:19-20). Why? Because Jesus recognized that the Judean winter was not the correct time of year to travel, especially for pregnant women. If we follow this line of reasoning, why would Caesar have called for a census in the middle of winter that could have caused arduous travel conditions?

The time of pasturing in Palestine cannot be ignored. At the time of Jesus' birth, Luke records that shepherds were abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. (Luke 2:8). This brings us to another important clue in Jesus' birth, it is highly unlikely there would be any shepherds abiding in the fields in December, it's simply too cold. The flocks are brought in from the fields while it is still warm enough, they are kept under shelter until about the end of February, so the flocks are not on the hills in December.

So where does this leave us? John's gospel provides us with a significant clue. (John 1:14) *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"*. John's gospel was written in Greek, and the Greek word for "dwelt" is tabernacle. The symbolism here is

unmistakable, Jesus was born and “tabernacled” among His people, and there is only one time in the Jewish calendar when this could happen.

The Jewish calendar year begins in the Autumn, that is late September or early October. The new year celebration of Rosh Hashana, which includes the days of atonement when they look for a new beginning and then remember when Moses led the children of Israel, and the feast of Tabernacles is celebrated by living in tents. What more appropriate time for the Shepherd of Israel to be born and to “tabernacle” with His people?

Let us move on.

Jesus of Nazareth is possibly the most well-known, most documented and most studied person in human history. No historian would ever argue that Jesus did not exist, there is simply too much evidence! Universities and institutions have been founded for His cause. Countless people have given their lives in devotion to the man that came as the Word. You can travel the world and rarely across anyone who has not heard of Him.

Jesus has been at the forefront of endless debates, scepticism, and controversy. His intentions to save mankind were coupled with a claim to be God, anything less is making Jesus out to be something He wasn't. It's a good question, isn't it? If Jesus were born today, would it be any different than it was 2,000 years ago?

We like to think the answer is yes, that we would be ready, that we wouldn't make the mistake of turning the Son of God away. There would be room in our inn, we confidently say. We'd find room, or make room, or maybe we'd throw somebody out of their room, but in any case, we'd be ready if Jesus were born in our town.

But is that the truth? Are we any more prepared for the coming of Bridegroom than they were in Bethlehem? That really is the crucial question, are we truly following our Shepherd?

Prayer: Dear Lord God, let us never diminish, by our traditions and complacency, what Jesus came to Earth to do. Quicken our understanding of the need to follow, step by step, in the footsteps of our Great Good Shepherd. Amen