

“The Word Was Made Flesh”

“The Word was made 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 1:14*

IN OUR OPENING VERSE, the expression “Word” is a translation of the Greek—*logos*. A footnote in *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott* for this verse explains the meaning of *logos* as it applied to the customs of the ancient world.

Paraphrasing the footnote:

In ancient kingdoms, an officer was designated by the king to be his “word” or voice. The officer would stand on the steps adjacent to the throne, separated from the king by a lattice window. The window was covered with a silk drape, but had openings through which the king would give commands to the officer. The officer would, in turn, communicate the king’s commands to the officers, judges, and attendants as necessary. Thus, using the Greek rendering, this officer was considered the *logos* of the king.

Using this Greek word as a title given to Jesus, John refers to him as the Word or Logos, during his

prehuman existence, when he lived as a spirit being in the heavenly realm. Paul states that Jesus, as the prehuman Logos, was the “firstborn of all creation,” and was used by God to create “all things in the heavens and upon the earth,” and “they all, through him and for him, have been created.” (Col. 1:15,16, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*) Similarly, in Revelation 3:14, the Logos is referred to as “the beginning of the creation of God.”

Our Scripture states that the Logos, the highest of all created spirit beings, humbled himself and “was made flesh.” That is, by the power of God, he underwent a change of nature from a spirit being to a human being. He was “born of a woman,” with a nature “lower than the angels,” and dwelt upon earth as the perfect man Jesus. (Gal. 4:4; Heb. 2:9, *Revised Version*) In this perfect human form, he willingly “gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” (I Tim. 2:6) Paul, speaking of Jesus’ wonderful example of humility, stated: “Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” (II Cor. 8:9) Paul also said concerning Jesus: “Though being in God’s form, yet did not meditate a usurpation to be like God, but divested himself, taking a bondman’s form, having been made in the likeness of men; and being in condition as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”—Phil. 2:5-7, *Diaglott*

A MIRACLE PERFORMED

Jesus’ earthly life did not begin after the usual manner of human conception. He did not have an earthly biological father. Instead, his Heavenly

Father took the life principle previously found in the Logos and, by a miracle, implanted it into the womb of Mary as an embryo human being. To announce this, “The angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, . . . and the virgin’s name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.”—Luke 1:26-28

When Mary saw Gabriel and heard his message, she was “greatly troubled, and began to deliberate, of what kind, this salutation might be.” (vs. 29, *EBR*) The angel reassured her, saying: “Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.” (vss. 30,31) We are later told that the announcement to Mary by Gabriel concerning the birth of Jesus had been made “before he was conceived in the womb.” (Luke 2:21) Thus we have confirmation of this great miracle performed by God.

GOD’S TIMETABLE

The time of Jesus’ birth was a favorable one, and doubtless overruled by God. The previous reign of the Grecian Empire had resulted in Greek being the accepted language over much of the world. Thus one common language could be used to convey and record such a momentous event. Additionally, it was also a time of relative peace, because the Roman Empire had conquered much of the world. Therefore, it was a most favorable time for the beginning of the Gospel, centered in Jesus. Many

other valuable lessons are found in the Scriptures concerning God's overruling providences surrounding Jesus' birth.

"It came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. . . . And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David)." (vss. 1-4) Through God's providence, just at the right moment in time, the Roman Emperor issued a decree regarding the taxing of his worldwide empire. This decree required that every male report to the city of his family lineage which, for Joseph, was Bethlehem. In this providential way, Joseph and Mary were brought to the very city prophesied by Micah. "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."—Mic. 5:2

Mary, ready to give birth to Jesus at any moment, journeyed nearly seventy miles with Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem. We can well imagine the difficulty and discomfort she must have had during this journey. Arriving at Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary found "there was no room for them in the inn." She "brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger." (Luke 2:7) The word "manger" refers to a feeding trough for animals. Few babies in the history of Israel were likely ever born in such humble surroundings.

Notice, however, there is no record of the slightest complaint or dissatisfaction from Joseph and Mary with these arrangements and conditions. We are reminded of the important lesson Jesus later gave to his followers “not to be over-anxious” about things of this present life, because our “Heavenly Father knows that you need these things.” Instead, Jesus said, “make His Kingdom and righteousness your chief aim.”—Matt. 6:25-33, *Weymouth New Testament*

HUMBLE SHEPHERDS

God announced the great event of Jesus’ birth as a human being by his mighty angels. Although worldly wisdom would have dictated otherwise, the angels were sent to humble shepherds who were in their fields, watching over their flocks at night. At that time, it was critical that shepherds remain with their flocks at night to guard against thieves and wild animals. Such a humble, yet important task, is a reminder to us of the importance God places on this quality of character, as we are told: “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”—James 4:6

Shepherds typically did not have much formal schooling. However, they were known to be a group of people who reasoned and thought deeply, because they had many hours to reflect upon and discuss with one another various subjects as they watched their flocks. Those who turned their thoughts to God perhaps meditated often on the words of the shepherd David, saying with him, “My mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: When I . . . meditate on thee in the night watches.” (Ps. 63:5,6) As they

looked up into the starry heavens, more of the psalmist's sentiments would most assuredly come to their minds: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork."—chap. 19:1

It was to this group of humble shepherds that God sent the first message concerning his only begotten Son being made flesh. The account reads: "There were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." (Luke 2:8-10) The expression "good tidings" comes from a Greek word which means "to announce good news." Elsewhere in the New Testament it has been translated as the familiar word "gospel." The angel of the Lord explained what these good tidings were, saying, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."—vs. 11

Continuing, the angel said to the shepherds, "This shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." (vs. 12) This information was necessary, not only to identify which baby in Bethlehem was the Savior, but also to draw the shepherds' thoughts and attention to the humble beginnings surrounding Jesus' birth. "Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (vss. 13,14) We have

not yet seen peace throughout the earth, nor good will toward all men. At the present time we continue to see wars, violence, injustice, sickness, sorrow, and death. This is because the work of selecting and completing the body of Christ still continues, as we are told: "All creation . . . is waiting and longing to see the manifestation of the sons of God." (Rom. 8:19, *WNT*) Once this work is finished, the words spoken by the heavenly host will be fulfilled.

After the angels left the shepherds, they said, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds." Returning to their flocks, the shepherds glorified and praised God "for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them."—Luke 2:15-18,20

EXEMPLARY PARENTS

"Mary was closely observing all these things, putting them together in her heart." (Luke 2:19, *EBR*) Mary and Joseph were dedicated and caring parents of Jesus, that they might raise and watch over him in a way which would please God. In obedience to the law given to Israel, Joseph and Mary had Jesus circumcised on the eighth day. (Lev. 12:1-3; Luke 2:21) Thirty-three days later, "when the days of her purification according to the law

of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.”—Luke 2:22-24

Under the Jewish Law, they were to bring a “lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering.” (Lev 12:6) However, the Law also provided that “if her means suffice not for a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves, or two young pigeons; the one for a burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering: and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean.” (vs. 8, *RV*) By this we learn that Joseph and Mary must have been poor, because no mention is made in the Luke account of a lamb, but of two turtledoves or pigeons.

WISE MEN FROM THE EAST

Matthew’s gospel states: “Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.” (Matt. 2:1,2) We note that the Bible nowhere states how many wise men came, although it is generally believed there were three, since that is the number of gifts they brought.—vs. 11

Looking for the King of the Jews, the wise men naturally went first to the palace of Herod, the Roman ruler over the region of Judaea, to make

inquiry. "When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." (Matt. 2:3) Herod likely felt threatened regarding his own rule. Others in Jerusalem were also troubled, perhaps referring to those who might have gained some advantages because of Herod's position as ruler.

Herod "gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together," and demanded that they tell him where Christ would be born. Being familiar with the prophecies regarding the Messiah, the chief priests and scribes immediately answered, "Bethlehem of Judaea." Herod called the wise men privately and asked them as to exactly "what time the star appeared." He then sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also." This was a deception by Herod, because if he knew exactly where the child Jesus was he could then kill him, thus protecting his own rulership.—vss. 4-8

After the wise men departed from King Herod, "the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was," and "they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way."—vss. 9-12

Joseph and Mary were no doubt surprised by the generous gifts received from these strangers from a faraway land. Each was precious and given at just the right time. Their costly value could likely be used by this poor family to meet expenses during their flight to Egypt, which would soon follow.

Each of these gifts also had a symbolic meaning. Gold, a relatively rare metal and considered precious throughout history, was a fitting gift for a future king sent by God. Gold is used throughout the Scriptures as a representation of the divine nature and the glory associated with God and his character attributes of wisdom, justice, love and power.

Frankincense comes from a Hebrew word which means “to be white.” Frankincense came from the sap of a particular tree found in parts of Arabia. Bitter to the taste, it produced an aromatic odor when burned. Frankincense was one of the ingredients in the incense crumbled upon the golden altar in The Holy of the Tabernacle. It was also put on top of the shewbread which likewise resided in the same compartment. (Exod. 30:34-38; Lev. 24:7) Because frankincense was used extensively in the Tabernacle arrangement, this gift seems to point forward to Jesus’ priestly service.

Myrrh is an aromatic resin obtained from the sap of a tree native to the Arabian Desert and parts of Africa. Like frankincense, it is also bitter to the taste. In ancient times, myrrh was used in beauty and cleansing treatments. For example, before a woman could see King Ahasuerus, she had to complete various treatments, some of which were with “oil of myrrh.” (Esther 2:12) Myrrh was also one of the ingredients in the “holy anointing

oil.” (Exod. 30:23-25) How beautifully myrrh portrayed in advance the bitter life of suffering for him who would be “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” (Isa. 53:3) Indeed, it was this suffering which developed in Jesus the spiritual beauty and purity of his character.

LOCATION OF THE WISE MEN’S VISIT

Nativity scenes have presented the visit of the wise men as taking place in Bethlehem on, or very shortly after, the night Jesus was born. However, numerous scriptural references give indication that the wise men probably came to Nazareth, and that their visit was some period of time after his birth. If the wise men had visited Jesus in Bethlehem shortly after his birth, Joseph and Mary would have needed to wait nearly six weeks, at a minimum, before fleeing to Egypt. This is because of the Law’s requirements, cited earlier, of Jesus’ circumcision on the eighth day, followed by another thirty-three days to complete Mary’s purification. After this, the Luke account says, they went to Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice in accordance with the Law. (Lev. 12:6; Luke 2:21-24) However, Matthew’s account states that Joseph did not wait to flee to Egypt, but they left during the night, immediately after the wise men’s departure. We read: “When they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt.”—Matt. 2:13,14

If the wise men had given their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh at the time of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary would have had the means to purchase and bring a lamb for the burnt offering forty-one days later. Surely, knowing the significance of Jesus' birth, they would not have held back from using the gifts received from the wise men to obtain a lamb, the preferred manner of meeting the Law's requirement. However, because the wise men did not visit until after the fulfillment of these obligations, Joseph and Mary did not have the means by which to offer a lamb.

Matthew 2:8, quoted earlier, at first seems to contradict these thoughts, saying that Herod sent the wise men "to Bethlehem," telling them to search there for Jesus. There is nothing in this verse, however, which indicates that Jesus was still there, or that the wise men went there at all. In fact, the account next says that the star "went before them," and guided them to the place where "the young child was." (vs. 9) If Jesus had been in Bethlehem, there would likely have been no need for the guidance of the star, since Bethlehem was located on the main travel route leading south from Jerusalem, and was only a few miles away. However, Nazareth was ninety miles to the north, and the wise men would have surely needed the guidance of the star to find Jesus there. Thus, although Herod may have thought Jesus was still in Bethlehem, and instructed the wise men to go there and report back, the entire matter was overruled otherwise by God.

Some further points should be considered concerning the location and timing of the wise men's visit. Matthew 2:11 states that they came "into the

house” when they presented their gifts to Jesus. In Luke 2:7, the account of the night Jesus was born, the record says that he was “laid . . . in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn”—that is, Joseph and Mary were not in a house at the time of Jesus’ birth. Additionally, on the night of Jesus’ birth the shepherds were told they would find the “babe” [Greek: *brephos*, a newborn infant] wrapped in swaddling clothes. (vs. 12) By contrast, the wise men came to see “the young child” [Greek: *paidion*, a child or little one]. This Greek word is used six times in the Matthew context concerning the wise men’s visit. (Matt. 2:8,9,11,13,14) Finally, when Herod realized he was “mocked of the wise men,” he issued a command to slay “all the children that were in Bethlehem, . . . from two years old and under.” (vs. 16) Here we take note that the command was that all children up to the age of two, not merely newborn babes, were to be killed.

Such detailed and minute distinctions as cited in the foregoing paragraphs may seem unnecessary to our understanding of God’s arrangements concerning the gift of his beloved Son. However, they serve as testimony to our Heavenly Father’s constant overruling and providential care over those with whom he is dealing and using in the carrying out of his eternal purposes for man’s eternal benefit. Let us never lose sight of his unerring wisdom and forethought.

MOST “RECEIVED HIM NOT”

During Jesus’ First Advent very few recognized him as the Son of God. “He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received

him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” (John 1:11,12) The word “believe” is translated from a Greek word which signifies not merely a mental or intellectual belief, but has a far deeper meaning—to have faith in, to entrust, to commit.

Those who trust and commit fully to follow in the footsteps of the Son of God have the assurance that although he endured “the suffering of death,” he is now “crowned with glory and honour,” having tasted “death for every man.” (Heb. 2:9) In the coming kingdom of righteousness, all mankind will see and realize they have a King who is wise, just, powerful, loving, and merciful—“a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord!” ■