

The Birth of Christ Part II

This article is a continuation of Part I

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Concerning this event, Michael Green wrote,

“Strange happenings at the birth of this Jewish Messiah; . . . the second remarkable thing that attended His birth was a very bright star over Bethlehem. Matthew’s Gospel tells us that astrologers (the Magi) had seen an unexpected star in the East and had come to worship the Being it denoted.

“In the year 7 B. C., there was a conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn known as “The Fishes,” a phenomenon that happens only once in 794 years. The stars all had a meaning to the men of antiquity. “Jupiter” denoted a world ruler; “Saturn” was considered the star of Palestine; and the “The Fishes” indicated the last day. Plainly, therefore, this meant that the ultimate ruler of the world appeared in Palestine this year. We do not ‘think’ people understood it in this way. We happen to ‘know’ that they did. Cuneiform tablets (the ancient equivalent of newsprint) have turned up in Sippar in Babylonia (the Greenwich of the ancient world) written in 8 B.C., foretelling this rare conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn the next year. This is why the wise men set out on their journey of discovery. That is why they turned up at Jerusalem, Palestine’s capital city, looking for the world ruler that would spring from Judea.”⁴

Jesus was born under Augustus Caesar (27 B.C. –14 A.D.) and died under Tiberius Caesar (14-37 A.D.). Noted American historian, H. G. Wells, rejected the gospel narratives, but he used them as his only source material for writing about Jesus and the spread of Christianity in the first century. He admitted that the narratives carried the conviction of reality, and felt compelled to say of Jesus, “Here was a man. This part of the tale could not have been invented.”⁵

The events leading up to the birth of Christ did not occur in a vacuum, nor did they transpire in a private place. Someone did not just make them up. The places, the names, and the events mentioned are verifiable in history! Doctor Luke wrote,

⁴Michael Green, *Who Is This Jesus?* Thomas Nelson Publishers; (Nashville: Tennessee), 1990, p. 24-25.

⁵H. G. Wells, *The Outline Of History*, Garden City Books; (Garden City: New York), 1920, vol. 1, p. 24-25.

“And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. And all went to be taxed, everyone into his own city. And Joseph also went from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David” (Luke 2:1-4).

Luke continues,

“Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberus Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness (Luke 3:1-2).

New Testament commentator William Barclay gives some insights into this passage:

“(1) Tiberus was the successor of Augustus and, therefore, the second Roman Emperor. As early as A.D. 11 or 12, Augustus had made him his colleague in imperial power, but he did not become sole emperor until A.D. 14 . . . (ii) The next three dates Luke gives are connected with the political organization of Palestine. The title tetrarch literally means governor of a fourth part. . . . (a) To Herod Antipas were left Galilee and Peraea. He reigned from 4 B. C. to 39 A.D., and, therefore, Jesus’ life was lived during Herod’s reign and very largely in Herod’s dominions in Galilee. (b) To Herod Philip were left Ituraea and Trachonitis. He reigned from 4 B.C. to 33 A.D. Caesarea Philippi was called after him and was actually built by him. (c) To Archelaus were left Judea, Samaria, and Edom. He was a thoroughly bad king . . . (iii) Of Lysanias we know practically nothing. (iv) Having dealt with the world situation and the Palestine political situation, Luke turns to the religious situation and dates John’s emergence as being in the priesthoods of Annas and Caiaphas. The high priest was at one and the same time the civil and religious head of the community. In the old days the office of the high priest

had been hereditary and for life. But with the coming of the Romans the office was full of all kinds of intrigue.”⁶

Summary:

How does the birth of Christ relate to the other things in His life? How does His virgin birth relate to His incarnation, His humanity, His deity, and His sinlessness? When Christ was conceived, He had no sin-nature passed on to Him. His conception was divine, but His birth was natural. The divine conception was essential to His sinlessness. Therefore, His sinlessness merited the attention of God.

Christ was equal to God in nature and character: “He that has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9b). In His human *form*, Christ was in the essence of, and He had the nature of God. Therefore, Christ was qualified to die for the power, the consequence, and penalty of sin, and guilt, (not just guilty feelings, but, true guilt). All these abnormalities are evident in the lives of all men and women.

Christ died on the cross of Calvary for the sins of *all* men and women. Man can only have a measure of understanding of his guilt. Some feel great heaviness, shame, and scorn. Others are not able even to feel or sense much reality in this realm, but there must be *some* understanding of the fact that we have not even kept our *own* standards perfectly, let alone God’s perfect standards.

We must understand to some degree the fact that we are guilty of sin in the presence of a Holy God. We are talking about ‘true moral guilt.’ And we need to understand something of what the Bible means in this area, our need of finding a way to get rid of our sin, or the cure and solution for our sin. Only in Christ, there is forgiveness of sins.

In religions outside of Christianity there are two words that are noticeably absent from them, they are, *guilt* (true guilt) and *substitution*. These two words are absent from: Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Mormonism, and other religions and cults. Why? Because they have no recognition of true guilt in man, and *no* need for a *substitution*, or no need for the cure *of sins* in the heart of man.

These religions and cults cannot be compared to the Christian faith, because all their founders are dead and buried. But, the founder of Christianity is resurrected—He is alive, and we experience true forgiveness in Him.

Christ came into this world for a purpose. He came to pay the price for human sin. He came to show us that He understands

⁶William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, The Westminster Press; rev., ed., (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania), 1975, p. 31-32.

the power of sin, and its pollution, and; therefore, He took on Himself its consequences, and its penalty, by His death on the Cross.

Christ's death was qualitatively different from all other deaths. In Christ, man's sins met their antidote, their cure, their solution, and their victory in life, over death --in the power of the resurrection of Christ!