

The Prophetic Purpose You Likely Never Knew About Jesus' Birth in Bethlehem

'Tis the season many reread the Christmas story. Certainly, Jesus' birth narrative is a cozy beginning to both Matthew's and Luke's Gospels. Reflecting upon its details of a meager couple, a little town of Bethlehem and a primitive birth tended by shepherds offers a bit of simplicity to the rat race of today's Christmas season.

Unfortunately, though, in all the familiarity of the Christmas story, people often miss the purpose God revealed through every feature. Yes, the people, place and setting of the story are no coincidental niceties. God didn't select them just for the fun of it. No, each point to Jesus' destiny, and the reason for His arrival to earth in the first place.

In this article, let's explore why God strategically chose Bethlehem.

Why Bethlehem?

Bethlehem was previously known as the city David was from and where he was crowned king of Israel. The humble town is approximately six miles south of Jerusalem, where Jesus would later be crucified. Because of a prophecy foretold by Micah, for some 700 years, God's people looked to Bethlehem as the birthplace of their long-awaited Messiah.

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, although you are small among the tribes of Judah, from you will come forth for Me one who will be ruler over Israel" (Mic. 5:2).

The Bible assures God orders the steps of His people (see Ps. 37:23). Perhaps there is no better example of this promise

than how Mary and Joseph found themselves delivering our Messiah in the place that was foretold.

As Luke recorded in his Gospel, while Mary was pregnant with baby Jesus, the Roman emperor decreed that a census be taken (see Luke 2:1). Consequently, because Joseph was a descendant of David's royal line, the census required he make the several-day journey from his residence in Nazareth to report to his ancestral home—Bethlehem. And the story is sure to note that Mary makes the journey, too. (One can imagine Mary's accompaniment was not by choice for a woman in her condition, but likely out of obligation to enroll as the new wife of Joseph.)

Consider the precise timing of these events. Just a little longer in Nazareth, and the prophecy of the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem would have failed. Yet by no planning on Mary's part, nor any intention on the part of the emperor to fulfill any prophecy, Mary and Joseph are brought to Bethlehem. And at just that moment, Mary goes into labor to deliver Jesus.

What Bethlehem Reveals

Bethlehem's selection by God as the birthplace of the Messiah was no happenstance. Nor was it chosen only because Joseph's lineage happened to originate there. No, Bethlehem was strategically picked to be part of God's redemption plan from the beginning—that Jesus would come to earth as the final, once-for-all, sacrificial lamb of God (see 1 Pet. 1:19–20).

As only God could know, events were orchestrated throughout the centuries, so that by the time of Jesus' birth, Bethlehem was the city where lambs purchased for sacrifice in the temple were born and raised. In fact, in those days, every first born male lamb in Bethlehem was set aside to later be delivered to Jerusalem. And without coincidence, so was the lamb of God.

Indeed, as we've reviewed here, Bethlehem points to the destiny of He who came as God's lamb to later be sacrificed

for the sin of the world. And although of monumental importance, this is only one detail of the story. There's so much more about the story that I explore in my special Christmas message, "Unwrapping the Real Meaning of Christmas." Tune into my inspiring cinematic presentation, and discover what you never knew the Christmas story points to.

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