

Why was Jesus born in a manger?

Luke 2:7 “and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

Have you ever stopped to consider why God allowed His only son to be born in a lowly manger? Could not an omniscient, loving, all powerful God have arranged a room at the inn? Or even better, could he not arrange for Jesus to be born in a palace with midwives, servants and clean water? Can you imagine bringing your wife into an animal stall to give birth, in the dark, without help? Can you imagine wrapping your son in swaddling cloth to protect his skin from the hay and placing him in a feed trough as a makeshift cradle? Rest assured, the author of all creation did not fall asleep at the wheel and overlook the hardship that this was to the parents. This choice was deliberate with a clear intentionality and purpose.

Many know that Micah prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem: Micah 5:2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." This was understood by the Pharisees at the time of Jesus and is referred to in several gospel accounts (Matt 2:5, John 7:42). God arranged for Joseph and Mary to be in Bethlehem in response to the Roman census. Why Bethlehem? It might be tempting to conclude that it was to honor David. It is likely that the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem were raising lambs in the very fields that King David, as a boy watched over his sheep and composed Psalms to honor his God. In fact the shepherds may have been on the same land that Boaz redeemed for Naomi and passed on to his son Jesse, David's father. However, I contend that this is not the reason for choosing Bethlehem.

Many do not realize that Micah further prophesied that kingship would come to the “Daughter of Jerusalem” at Migdal Eder: Micah 4:8 “As for you, O watchtower of the flock [Hebrew *Migdal Eder*], O stronghold of the Daughter of Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem.” Migdal Eder was a watchtower located in the northern part of Bethlehem built to protect the Temple flocks.¹ “During lambing season the sheep were brought there from the fields, as the lower level functioned as the birthing room for sacrificial lambs.”² Priestly shepherds “would wrap the newborn lambs in swaddling clothes” and place them in a manger “until they calmed down”³ to keep them “without defect”⁴, suitable to be sacrificial lambs for the sin of the Israelites. Bethlehem was special because the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem raised lambs for the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The shepherds who heard the angelic choir and came to see the baby Jesus were certainly familiar with the technique to birth a sacrificial lamb, and were likely puzzled by why a baby was birthed in the manner and location of a sacrificial lamb. In fact the angels did not have to tell the

¹ Alfred Edersheim, *The life and times of Jesus the Messiah*, book 2, pg 131

² Charles E. McCracken, *For you and me, Israel My Glory*, Nov/Dec 2008 pg 25.

³ Jimmy DeYoung, “Jimmy’s Prophetic Perspective on the News,” Dec 23, 2005.

⁴ Leviticus 4:32

shepherds precisely where to go in Bethlehem to find Jesus, because there was only one manger where sacrificial lambs were birthed, the cave under the watch tower of Migdal Edar.⁵

With hindsight we can clearly see that the manner of Jesus' birth foreshadowed the purpose for Jesus coming into the world:

John 1:29 "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!""

1 Peter 1:18-20 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

Before Jesus had taken his first breath God had decided that his life was to be given as a sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins. God testified to his intent by having Jesus be born in the manner and location of the sacrificial lambs of the temple just as the prophet Micah proclaimed.

⁵ Abrams, C. P. *Where was the birthplace of the Lord Jesus?*, <http://www.bible-truth.org/BirthPlaceofJesus.html>