

Devotions with Your Feet

It's not just a tour, it's a journey with eternal benefits.

Top of the Arbel Pass, looking over into Upper Galilee

A Quarterly Newsletter

"O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!" rings in our ears as we are drawn back to our time with many of you and our visit to the Church of the Nativity. As we reflect on the fact that the God of the universe came and dwelt among us, we thought it would be fitting to share some of the historical and archaeological facts surrounding this miraculous event!

• **The Church of the Nativity.** The Church of the Nativity is a basilica located in Bethlehem. The church was originally commissioned in 327 AD by Constantine and his mother,

Helena, over the site that is still traditionally considered to be located over the cave that marks the birthplace of Jesus. After destruction of this church, the Byzantine

Emperor, Justinian, built a basilica in 565 AD. While numerous additions have been made, Justinian's basilica serves as the main center of the Church today!

• **The Earliest Reference to Bethlehem outside of the Scriptures.** Evidence of the existence of Bethlehem during the period of the First Temple was discovered at the Temple Mount Salvage Project just a couple of years ago. A 2,700-year-old bulla, stamped clay used to seal official documents, was found bearing the



The fragment also includes the Hebrew word "seventh," which may suggest that it was connected to a tax paid by Bethlehem in the seventh year of the rule of one of the kings of Jerusalem.

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name of "Bethlehem" in ancient Hebrew writing.

• **A Typical Manger**—We often depict the manger as a wooden piece of furniture; however, far more likely, is a manger that was carved out of stone.



This manger can be seen at Megiddo.

"In Bethlehem the cave is pointed out where He was born, and the manger in the cave where He was wrapped in swaddling clothes. And the rumor is in those places, and among foreigners of the Faith, that indeed Jesus was born in this cave who is worshipped and reverenced by the Christians."

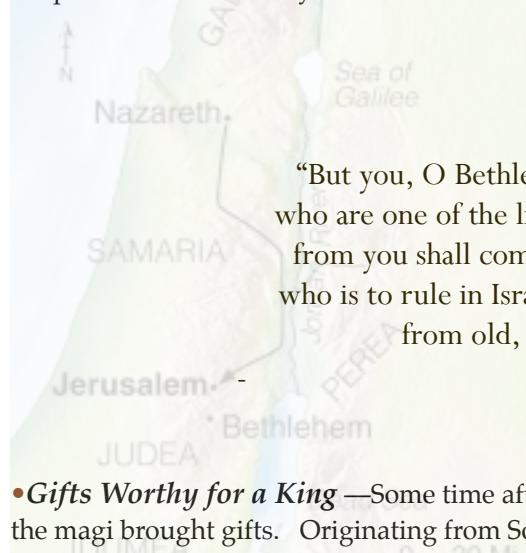
Origen of Alexandria
(185 - 254 AD)

not be surprising that Herod would seek to eliminate any contender for his throne—even an innocent baby born in Bethlehem.



Coin minted by Herod the Great. Note the anchor on the left—a symbol used to commemorate the building of the harbor at Caesarea.

• **The Journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem** —While we are uncertain of the exact route Joseph and Mary took to Bethlehem, the journey would have been approximately 100-miles. With Mary close to giving birth, it would have taken the couple at least 8 to 10 days.



"But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me one
who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is
from old, from ancient days."

~ Micah 5:2

• **Gifts Worthy for a King** —Some time after Jesus was born, the magi brought gifts. Originating from Southern Arabia, frankincense emitted a fragrant odor and was used as a symbol of the Divine name (cf. Malachi 1:11) and an emblem of prayer (cf. Ps 141:2). Frankincense was often associated with another resin from Southern Arabia, myrrh (cf. Song of Solomon 3:6). Myrrh was also used in the Temple as an ingredient in the anointing oil used to dedicate the Tabernacle, the high priests, and the kings.

• **Nazareth** —Little archaeological work has taken place in Nazareth. When the new Church of the Annunciation was built in 1955,



The Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth

in 14 AD. Caesar added "Divi Filius" or "Son of the Divine" to his name in 42 BC. Ironically, the true Son of the Divine

archaeologists were able to demonstrate that Nazareth was an agricultural settlement. Some scholars believe that this Church was built on a Jewish-Christian synagogue—perhaps the site of the synagogue mentioned in Luke 4:16.

• **Caesar Augustus**

—The first Roman emperor, he founded the Roman Empire, ruling from 27 BC until his death

would come to Bethlehem, not Rome, approximately 40 years later.



A denarius minted depicting the Roman Emperor Augustus. Under his reign, a census was required in several locations throughout the Empire.



Indeed, of all the places for the King of Kings to be born, Bethlehem would have been an unlikely candidate. Yet, God in His sovereignty selected this obscure location to enter time and space to be born in a stable. Think of it, the God of the universe needing His diapers changed?! Paul aptly notes that Jesus humbled himself by taking on the form of a slave, by looking like other men, and by sharing in human nature (Phil 2:7). This is our Savior! He was willing to leave His pre-incarnate glory for our sake. This little village reminds us that our Savior was willing to dwell among us—our Emmanuel!

May you have a blessed Christmas as you celebrate the birth of our Savior, the One who was born in the city of David—Bethlehem!

Blessings to you,
~ Rich and David



Frankincense, Gold, and Myrrh

The Grotto of the Church of the Nativity, an underground cave located beneath the basilica, enshrines the site where Jesus is said to have been born. The exact spot is marked beneath an altar by a 14-pointed silver star set into the marble floor and surrounded by silver lamps.



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