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This is a condensed version of an original narrative written by Westerly Tressler and restructured for reading to children. See chapter 12 in *Forty-Two Months and Ten Toes, The Perfect Jewish Calendar*, Trafford Publications, 2013 by Westerly Tressler for documentation, or visit;

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This booklet is a continuation of the story narrated in *Mary Kindled the Hanukkah Candles*.

## **Prelude**

*Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent to the city of Nazareth in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary, who was espoused to a man named Joseph of the house of David, saying, Fear not! You have found favor with God! You will conceive a Son, and name Him YESHUA!*

Paraphrased from Luke 1:26–31

*Another sign appeared in heaven: Behold! A great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads; stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child when He was born.*

Paraphrased from Revelation 12:3–4

# ***THE THREE STARS OF BETHLEHEM***

## **A *Sukkoth*–Christmas Narrative For Family and Children**

### **Caesar’s Registration Decree**

On a hot late-summer day, Mary’s father, Heli (Kē-lē') arrived home around noon, and said, “Caesar Augustus has issued a decree that everyone in his empire must be registered. Even we Jews are to be registered so Caesar can begin ordering our young Jewish men to serve in his army. He’ll also have the ability to tax us Jews to support any of his future wars.”

Mary’s husband Joseph retorted, “Jews have never been required to register! Caesar just wants to extend his rule over the entire world!”

Heli replied, “Unless the LORD Himself causes Caesar to rescind the decree, we’ll have no choice but to obey his order. I believe, however, whatever happens will be in our LORD’s plan.”

Joseph angrily asked, “Where are we supposed to register?”

Heli replied, “Every Jewish family will be required to register in its own ancestral city.”

Joseph asked, “How soon must we register?”

Heli explained, “Even though the Romans won’t finish compiling the census for another ten years, we’ll only have one year to get registered.”

NOTE: Beginning in 6BCE(BC), Jews were required to register for a Roman census. This was NOT an order to pay taxes, but it was a registration for a population count that would be finalized 11 years later in 6CE(AD), during the governorship of Publius Sulpicius Quirinius (CE/AD 6–9). Under Roman law a census had to be compiled every 14<sup>th</sup> year. The previous census was compiled in 8BCE.

Joseph reasoned, “Then we can wait until after the Baby is born. A trip to Bethlehem before the Baby is born could be devastating for Mary.”

There was a long period of silence. Then Mary asked, “Father, if we wait until after my Baby is born, will he have to be registered as a citizen of Rome?” Mary’s question took both Heli and Joseph by surprise. They did not have an immediate answer. Mary continued, “If my Baby becomes a Roman national, how can he possibly become the King of the Jews?”

Heli agreed, saying, “Mary’s right. We can’t allow the Baby to become a subject of Caesar.”

Joseph agreed, saying, “I guess we can’t wait until after the Baby is born. If we do, I’ll have to register Him as our firstborn Child. Then He would be named in the next census.”

Mary said, “According to Zacharias, my Baby should be born on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of *Sukkoth* (sūk-kōth’; meaning, the Feast of Tabernacles). I know there are no plans for me to attend *Sukkoth* this year, but to prevent the Baby from becoming a subject of Rome, you’ve no choice but to take me along.”

Joseph agreed, saying, “We must leave soon. Every day we wait will only put more stress on Mary and the Baby. We can’t even wait for the caravans that will soon assemble for the trip.”

Mary countered, “If we leave now, wouldn’t we be traveling alone? That could be dangerous with so many robbers and renegades waiting along the road.”

Heli had a plan, and explained, “A caravan of Sages from Babylon has camped for the Sabbath just outside of Nazareth. They plan to arrive at Jerusalem in time to observe both *Rosh Hashanah* (the Feast of Trumpets) and *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement). Mary’s mother and I, along with Joseph, will prepare for your trip today. Tomorrow we’ll rest for the Sabbath. Then on Sunday morning, Joseph can ask the leader of the caravan if the two of you may join them.”

### **Mary and Joseph meet the Sages**

Early Sunday morning, Joseph called to Mary, saying, “Tell your family goodbye. We don’t want to miss our chance to travel with the caravan.”

After kissing the family goodbye, Mary and Joseph walked toward the edge of Nazareth. Joseph led a donkey carrying a large pack on its back. The air was already warm, and the clear sky promised the afternoon heat would be oppressive. When they reached the main road, Joseph asked a caravan watchman, “Where’s the leader of the caravan?”

The watchman replied, “Mordecai (mōr-dē-kā-ē) is standing over by that tree.”

Mary looked over to where the man was pointing. Mordecai was a stately man, and he appeared to have many servants and animals.

She noticed there were other men in the caravan who also appeared to be very wealthy. Mary followed Joseph as he walked over to ask for permission to join the caravan. “My name is Joseph, a carpenter from Bethlehem,” he said. “My wife’s name is Mary. I was told you’re going to Jerusalem. We would like to travel as far as the city with you, because we need to be in Bethlehem before the beginning of *Sukkoth*.”

Mordecai looked at Joseph for a moment. Next he looked at the donkey. Then he focused his eyes on Mary. “Your wife is very young and also very beautiful,” he said. “She also appears to be heavy with child. Where’s the animal she’ll be riding on?”

Joseph hesitantly answered, “She’ll walk most of the time. When she becomes tired, I’ll carry the donkey’s pack so she can ride for a while.”

Mordecai replied, “We plan to be in Jerusalem in time to celebrate, *Rosh Hashanah*. I fear she may slow us down too much. Then if she happens to deliver the Child on the way, we would lose a number of travel days. I don’t think it would be wise to let you travel with us.”

Mary impulsively exclaimed, “I’ve made many trips to Jerusalem! If my father were here he would tell you I’ve never lagged behind him or any of my brothers! It’s very important that we get to Bethlehem before my Baby is born!”

Mordecai studied Mary’s face, and then said, “Joseph, you have a wife who doesn’t seem to have accepted her place in society.”

“She’s very opinionated,” Joseph apologized.

“I see,” Mordecai mused. “Here’s the problem, Mary. I never purchase a cow I may have to carry home.”

“You’re intelligent like my father,” Mary tactfully responded. “He always takes a cow for a walk before he buys it. If it’s not lame, he makes the purchase.”

Mordecai leaned against the tree. Then he looked at Joseph, and said. “Your wife is also clever, Joseph. The two of you will travel next to me for the rest of the day. If Mary walks in a proper manner as she claims she can, I’ll reevaluate whether you may accompany us.”

Joseph answered, “Mary is a very resolute woman. Thank you for giving us an opportunity to accompany you.”

Mordecai again looked at Mary. Then with a look of skepticism, he said, “May *El Shaddai* (ĕl'-shă-dă-ē'; meaning, GOD Almighty) forgive me for anticipating your failure to keep up with us.”

Withholding a negative response Mary bowed, and said, “Thank you, Master Mordecai. *El Shaddai* will surely bless you and your family for your gracious kindness.”

Mordecai turned to his servant, and said, “The caravan is well rested this morning. We’ll travel a little faster than normal. Even if the young girl lags by the way you’re not to slow down. The quicker she fails, the sooner we’ll be rid of her and her arrogant attitude!”

Mordecai signaled for his servant to sound the

*Shofar* (shō-fār'; meaning, a ram's horn) for the caravan to advance. As the caravan began the ninety-mile trip toward Jerusalem, Mary faced a sultry morning breeze. Whenever the terrain made walking difficult for Mary, Joseph shouldered the donkey's pack to allow her to ride for short distances. The trip that first day was long and arduous for the expectant mother.

Finally the signal was given for the caravan to halt and make camp. Joseph unrolled their bedrolls so Mary could rest while he prepared something to eat. Mordecai strolled over and asked, "How are you doing Mary? You managed to keep up with us on this first day. Do you still think you will be able to keep up with us?"

Mary emphatically replied, "I'm tired, but with *El Shaddai's* help I'll do it, Master Mordecai!"

Mordecai sighed, and said, "You're a determined young woman." Then he said to his servant, "Escort Mary to the women's tent! Assign the handmaid Deborah to assist her. She'll spend the night with my wives and concubines. I'll sleep in the men's tent tonight. In the morning we'll decide whether this couple will be allowed to continue traveling with us."

Without waiting for a response from either Joseph or Mary, Mordecai motioned for Joseph to follow him to the men's tent. The servant led Mary to the women's tent. After the evening meal was finished, Deborah, who was an older and matronly woman, washed Mary and made a comfortable bed for her. When Mary reclined on

her bed, the Baby began moving incessantly. So she whispered, “Please little Baby, go to sleep. I need to rest for tomorrow’s journey!”

### **Mary sees Three Wandering Stars**

The Baby continued kicking and moving throughout the night, so Mary was unable to sleep for more than a few minutes at a time. She finally arose and stepped outside. The moon had disappeared over the western horizon, but high in the eastern sky Three Wandering Stars were outshining all the twinkling stars in the predawn darkness. As she wondered about them, she noticed several men were gathered in front of her. They were also observing the three stars. Curious as to why they seemed so interested in them, she asked, “Is there something special about those three bright stars?”

With a self-important air, Mordecai answered, “Those Three Wandering Stars may join together to become the Star of the Messiah (i.e., the Christ) during the Festival of *Sukkoth*. Moses spoke of the ‘Messianic Prophet’ in the *Torah* (tō-rāk'; i.e. the Pentateuch). A conjunction of those two brightest wandering stars occurred three times last year; first while we were *Counting the Omer* (i.e., counting the 49 days between Passover and *Shavuot*, shā-vū-ōt'; i.e., the Day of Pentecost), then again during *Sukkoth*, and again during *Hanukkah* (khā'-nūk-kā; the Feast of Rededication), which confirmed the Messiah was conceived during *Hanukkah*. Then during this past Festival of *Shavuot*, we noticed two of these Wandering Stars began clustering near that



third Wandering Star. They didn't merge, but we believe the three of them will approach each other again during *Sukkoth*."

NOTE: At this time in history, the planets were referred to as "Wandering Stars," because they seemed to move about between the constellations. A one-time three-star conjoining of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars occurs only once every 805 years. Johannes Kepler observed this phenomenon in 1604CE (probably on September 9<sup>th</sup>) when it occurred in the constellation of Ophiuchus (ō-fē-ū'-kūs). This is a large 13<sup>th</sup> constellation on the ecliptic the Babylonians never included in the zodiac. Kepler calculated Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars had previously massed together in 6BCE. His calculations are confirmed by the Babylonian almanacs from that epoch; see *Marking Time*, by Duncan Steel, 2000, John Wiley, page 324–25.

"Who are you?" asked Mary.

Mordecai seemed reluctant to give Mary an explanation, but he managed to say, "We're descendant sons of King Hezekiah, and have come from Babylon in the east.

Mary was still wondering why she had been chosen to give birth to the Messiah, and asked, "If you only study the *Torah*, how can you be sure it's time for the Messiah to be born?" Then before Mordecai could answer, she asked another question; "Why must the Messiah have been conceived during *Hanukkah*? Doesn't that Festival simply celebrate the Rededication of Zerubbabel's (zē-rūb'-bā-bēl') Temple?"

Mordecai reluctantly explained, "The prophet Haggai promised Israel would be blessed after Kislev 24. Kēs'lēv 25 is the 1<sup>st</sup> day of *Hanukkah*."

Mary asked, "Is that the only sign the Messiah would be conceived during *Hanukkah*?"

“No!” replied Mordecai. “Haggai also asked, *is there yet any seed in the barn?* The miracle of finding only one vial of undefiled oil that kept the Menorah (mēn-nō'rā) burning for eight nights in the Temple for its Rededication; was like the miracle of preserving the *Seed of Eve* through the eight celebrations of the Passover recorded in the Scriptures from Adam to Ezra; and also affirms the Messiah’s miraculous conception took place during the eight days of *Hanukkah*.”

Mary asked, “Isn’t the Messiah supposed to be a descendant of King David’s son Solomon?”

“No!” answered Mordecai. “His mother must be a young virgin, who is a descendant granddaughter of Shelomith (shēl-ō-mēth'), the daughter of Zerubbabel’s wife that is a descendent granddaughter of the wife of Nathan the fourth son of King David; and whose father is a descendant of Jeshua, the son of Jehozadak (jē-hōd'-zā-dāk') the high priest.”

Mary asked, “Is it possible one of the members of your caravan could be the mother of the Messiah, and you are unwittingly escorting her to Jerusalem for his Nativity?”

Mordecai sternly answered, “Leave us alone! We’ll recognize the mother of the Messiah when we find her....and she won’t be a brazen young female like you!”

Mary stood in stunned silence. Mordecai had unwittingly revealed to her why she had been chosen to be the mother of the Messiah. She turned and made her way back to the women’s

tent. While lying on her bed, she quietly said to herself, “My mother is a descendant of Zerubbabel’s daughter Shelomith, and my father is a priest from the house of Jeshua the son of Jehozadak the High Priest. The angel Gabriel told me my Baby is the Promised Messiah. Maybe I should tell Mordecai that the one he’s seeking is in the camp....No! The LORD Himself must reveal this to Mordecai. He would never believe me anyway.”

### **Mordecai renders the Decision**

The Baby continued to squirm and kick inside Mary’s womb, so she was still unable to sleep soundly. All too soon, Deborah awakened her. It was time to get dressed and prepare for the day’s journey. Mary was about to begin taking care of her bed when Deborah returned with a plate of fruit and bread and milk, and said, “Sit on your cushion and eat while I pack your bedding and personal items.”

Mary replied, “I’ve never been waited on before. You need not wait on a lowly girl like me.”

Deborah explained, “You’ll be treated exactly like Master Mordecai has ordered. Maybe you’ve found favor with him. Or he may be treating you kindly before informing you that you cannot accompany us to Jerusalem.”

Mary was sure Deborah’s latter statement was why Mordecai had ordered her to be treated so well, and said, “I should have allowed Joseph to speak for the two of us when we sought to join

the caravan. I no doubt perturbed Mordecai early this morning also, by asking him to explain why he's making this trip to Jerusalem. My boldness is sometimes annoying to men. It was because of my audacity that I almost lost my chance to marry my husband, Joseph."

Deborah expressed her thoughts. "Every woman in this tent is wondering how Mordecai will react to your conversation with him, both yesterday and early this morning. We all heard what you said to him yesterday. Then one of his wives that awake when you went outside last night, informed all of us what was said."

"What do they think he'll do?" asked Mary.

Deborah answered, "We all hope he'll let you accompany us. You're very knowledgeable, and you know how to express your opinion. We respect you for that. However, most of us think he'll expel you from the caravan, because women in Babylon are not allowed to question the men."

"But, we're not in Babylon!" Mary exclaimed. "This is Israel! Women in Israel are allowed to run their households and express their thoughts to their husbands! Husbands listen to what we have to say....even though they are the ones that make the final decisions."

Without looking around, Mary finished her breakfast. When she stood she noticed every woman in the tent was staring at her with looks of admiration. Mary was flattered but self-conscious. Trying not to walk like a woman heavy with child, she made her way outside.

Joseph had been watching for her and greeted her with a gentle kiss. Then he led her to where Mordecai was conversing with the other sages, and said, “Master Mordecai, you stated you would make your decision this morning as to whether we’ll be allowed to accompany the caravan to Jerusalem.”

Mordecai deftly replied, “You have a very stubborn wife, Joseph, and she’s proven she can walk like a cow for one day! But we decided she can’t keep up with us all the way to Jerusalem!”

Tears began forming in Mary’s eyes. She quickly stepped behind Joseph, so Mordecai could not see the tears streaming down her cheeks. Joseph took a deep breath to control his faltering voice, and said, “We understand. You have spoken. We’ll abide by your decision.”

“Don’t leave!” ordered Mordecai. “I have something more to say. I raised a daughter that was never able to walk. She was beautiful and audacious like Mary, and she was determined to come with us to Jerusalem. I had her transported in a palanquin (pal'-ān-kēn'; a litter), but before we arrived in Damascus, she became sick and I had to bury her near the desert. After I buried her, I vowed in front of these men no one else would ever be carried in her palanquin.”

Mordecai hesitated in order to regain his composure. Mary wiped her tear-stained face and stepped out from behind Joseph. Mordecai focused his eyes on Mary, and said, “You even resemble my daughter. Her name was Mary also.

All the men in the caravan voted to relieve me of my vow concerning my daughter's palanquin. Therefore, you will ride in it! The handmaid, Deborah, will assist you on the journey!"

Four men walked up and placed a beautifully decorated litter mounted on two staves, beside Joseph and Mary. Mordecai stepped in front of Mary, and asked, "Joseph? May I assist the woman who has replaced my daughter?"

Bewildered, Joseph replied, "Yes!"

Mordecai bent over and kissed Mary on each cheek. Then he gently said, "Let me help you in, Mary. It's time for the caravan to move forward."

Unable to speak without bursting into tears of joy, Mary stepped into the litter and sat down. The four servants smiled at Mary, and then lifted the litter and set it on their shoulders. Deborah seemed content as she sat on a donkey beside the litter, so she could wait on Mary during the trip. Mordecai ordered the *Shofar* to be sounded and the caravan began moving forward.

### **The Mountain at Bethel**

After about a week the caravan reached the mountain east of Bethel. The Three Wandering Stars now looked like a large scalene triangle. After consulting with the other men, Mordecai decided the caravan would camp at Bethel. While Mary was sitting by the campfire, Joseph informed her about what the leaders had said. When Mordecai noticed the distressed look on Mary's face, he walked over to join the

conversation. "I know you're both determined to arrive in Bethlehem before Mary's Baby is born," he said, "but I've been informed that Jews have been allowed a year in which to register, in order to be included in the next census. Deborah is a midwife, so it would be sensible for you to wait here with us until after the Baby is born."

Tears began forming in Mary's eyes. "You've been so kind to Joseph and me, Master Mordecai. Your generosity and concern for my welfare has kept us safe; and I've also become very fond of Deborah along with your wives and concubines. The thought of being separated from this caravan is very stressful."

"Then stay here with us," insisted Mordecai. "This is the mountain on which our father, Abraham, worshipped *El Shaddai*. It was on this mountain our father Jacob saw a ladder reaching to heaven on which the angels ascended and descended. It was here *El Shaddai* appeared to Jacob and changed his name to Israel. It was here *El Shaddai* promised kings would come forth from Israel's posterity. We're looking for the birth of the King of the Jews, and it's possible he may be born here on Bethel."

That ended the conversation and everyone bedded down for the night. Mary and Joseph wondered if the LORD would allow the Baby to be born on the mountain of Bethel. That night Mary slept soundly because the Baby was resting quietly. But when the rays of the sun began dissipating the morning mists, the Baby

once again began squirming and kicking. Mary awakened and stepped outside of the palanquin. Looking up into the clear blue sky, she softly said, “My Baby knows his Three Wandering Stars are still shining in the heavens.”

Joseph had been waiting for Mary to arise. He strolled over, and asked, “Did you receive any sign from *El Shaddai*?”

“I don’t think so,” she replied.

Joseph answered, “Without a clear sign from *El Shaddai*, we’ll be hard pressed to convince Mordecai to send us on our way.”

Mordecai walked over and sat down on a rock and faced both Joseph and Mary. He cleared his throat several times. Then with a faltering voice, he uttered one short sentence. “I had a dream last night.” Mordecai put his head into his hands and remained silent for quite some time. Then he said, “When I awoke this morning, I realized my dream was a sign that I must send you on to Jerusalem.”

Joseph replied, “Neither Mary or I will hold it against you if you send us on our way.”

Mordecai again covered his face with his hands, and shook as he tried not to cry in front of Joseph and Mary. Finally, he said, “I’ll furnish you with three more donkeys. One will be for Mary, and one for Deborah. The other one will carry Deborah’s things and the items Mary has received from the women.”

Joseph protested, saying, “I don’t have any way to pay for three donkeys and a handmaid!”



Mordecai did not accept Joseph's objection, and stated, "The donkeys are a gift from the leaders of the caravan. We are two days journey from Jerusalem so you'll leave tomorrow morning. Two of my slaves will accompany you and guard your camp tomorrow night. Then in the morning they'll send you on your way and return to me here at Bethel."

Through tears of mixed emotions, Mary said, "Your kindness and generosity is overwhelming, and I know you'll find the Messiah because you've obeyed *El Shaddai*."

Mordecai seemed to ignore Mary's encouraging words, and instead said to Joseph, "Deborah is a midwife, so she'll stay with you until after Mary's Baby is born. You'll also be given money to care for Deborah. After we've found the Messiah, and have given him our gifts, we'll come to Bethlehem to find Deborah, so she can return with us to Babylon."

In the morning, Joseph, Mary, and Deborah, accompanied by the two slaves, headed for Jerusalem. The next morning, the two slaves returned to Bethel and the trio continued on to Jerusalem. As they neared the city they met Zacharias and Elizabeth, and little six-month-old John (John the Baptist). Then for the next ten days they celebrated *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* together at the Temple in Jerusalem.

### **The Trip to Bethlehem**

Early Tuesday morning, they began the one-

day trip to Bethlehem. Around noon, Mary said, "I'm looking forward to arriving at your father's home, so Deborah and I can bathe ourselves and prepare for the arrival of my Baby."

"I'm looking forward to that too," said Deborah.

Joseph remained silent. Finally Mary asked, "Aren't you looking forward to spending time with your family, Joseph?"

Joseph hesitated. Then choosing his words carefully, he answered, "The first thing I must do when we get to Bethlehem is appear before the Chief Publican to register for the next census."

"Can't we go to your father's house first?" Mary asked. "We could leave from there to register."

Joseph brought the donkeys to a halt. Walking over to Mary, he reached for her hand. Then he looked into Mary's eyes, and said, "I spoke to my father while we were at the Temple. We won't be welcome into his home at this time."

"It's because of me, isn't it?" Mary suggested. "You should never have married me! I've brought nothing but shame and disrepute upon you and your family! You should have allowed me to endure the consequences of birthing the Baby, by myself!"

Joseph's eyes filled with tears, as he said, "Mary, you're the most precious person in my life. I love you more than you'll ever know. I count it a privilege to have married such a virtuous and beautiful woman. The angel told me not to be afraid. So whatever disrepute I must endure because of this Child, I will gladly

accept. My joyful task will be to love and support you during our times of despair.”

Mary put her hands around her protruding middle, and said, “I feel the pangs of childbirth!”

“We’ll camp here for the night so you can rest,” said Joseph. “We’ll reach Bethlehem tomorrow.”

### **The Registration at Bethlehem**

On Thursday morning, Joseph led Mary to Bethlehem’s town square. The Chief Publican’s mansion was a short distance from the square, but his elaborate registration booth was prominently positioned on the square itself. Many other families, who also had ancestors in Bethlehem, had already lined up in the square. They were also taking advantage of registering just prior to the Festival of *Sukkoth*, because the males were required to appear in Jerusalem for that Festival anyway. Mary and Joseph spent part of the morning waiting in line to be interviewed. Finally it was Joseph’s turn to declare his family members and property rights.

The Chief Publican recognized Joseph, and said, “Well Joseph, you certainly didn’t waste any time in making your appearance for this very first registration of Jews. The last thing I heard was that you traveled to Nazareth to fetch a bride. Did you marry your betrothed bride?”

Joseph answered, “Yes. Mary is also appearing as required.”

The Publican looked at Mary, and asked, “Didn’t you marry her immediately after

*Shavuot?* Whose Child is she carrying?”

“I’ll adopt the Child after it’s born!” Joseph curtly replied.

As the Publican began to enter Joseph’s name into the record, he muttered, “I wonder who has committed the greatest sin? Publicans like me? Harlots like Mary? Or those who knowingly marry harlots instead of having them stoned?”

Neither Joseph nor Mary offered a response to the Publican’s comments. Instead they ignored his degrading remarks and only answered questions relevant to the registration process.

### **Joseph builds a *Sukkah***

On Friday morning, Joseph took a donkey into the countryside and gathered leafy branches. He planned to build a *sukkah* (sūk'-kā; a three-sided shelter made of palm and willow branches to live in during the 7-day celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles). Deborah stayed with Mary because she needed to be present whenever the Baby was ready to deliver.

It was about the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> hour (noon) when Joseph returned. He spent a short time with the two women and then went into the city to find a place to erect the temporary shelter. When he entered Bethlehem’s town square, he discovered it was already crowded with booths. No one though, had chosen to erect his *sukkah* near the Chief Publican’s registration stand. On one side of the stand there was a hitching post and a feeding trough where the Publican’s donkey was tied while he registered families for the census. In spite of the contempt shown toward him by

the Publican, Joseph spent considerable time erecting his booth adjacent to the feeding trough. First he fastened some sticks together to frame three walls and a roof. Next, some leafy branches were used to line the three walls. The roof was also covered with leafy branches. They were loosely spread so anyone lying inside could see some stars through the openings. The front side, facing the feeding trough, was left open. When the *sukkah* was completed, Joseph returned to the camp and led the two women to the town square. Deborah arranged a bed inside the shelter for Mary, but Joseph and Deborah would sleep on their bedrolls.

Joseph pulled two candles from the donkey's pack, and said, "At sunset the Lunar High Sabbath of *Sukkoth* will begin. It'll also be a Regular 7<sup>th</sup> day Solar Sabbath."

Mary agreed, saying, "I'm glad it'll soon be time to light the Sabbath candles. Mordecai and Zacharias both believe this 1<sup>st</sup> day of the Festival is the Appointed Time for the Baby to be born. The Baby is pressing down and the jabbing pains are reoccurring with greater frequency."

Deborah examined Mary to confirm her suspicions. Then she said, "Joseph, the Baby may be born very soon."

### **No Room at the Inn**

After Joseph had finished positioning the Sabbath candles, he responded, "The Bethlehem Inn is by the road just outside of town. We may

find a private place for the Baby to be born there? Let's help Mary onto her donkey. We'll see if we can secure a suitable spot in the Inn."

When they arrived at the Inn, Joseph rang the bell to the courtyard. Soon the proprietor came to the gate. But before Joseph could say anything the proprietor recognized him, and said, "Harlots are not welcome at this Inn, Joseph. I maintain a respectable business here."

Joseph responded, "My wife is about to deliver a Baby! We need a private place for His birth."

The proprietor replied, "She should have considered the consequences of playing the roll of a harlot, and you should have considered the consequences of taking a harlot as a wife! There's no room for the likes of her at this Inn. Take her down by the dung heap at the other end of town! That's where harlots drop and dispose of their babies!"

While Joseph was leading the donkey back into Bethlehem, Deborah said, "In a dream I saw Mary's Baby being born in that *sukkah* you built this afternoon."

Joseph withheld his response for several minutes. Then he said, "Deborah, you've been a wonderful blessing to Mary and me. Mary loves you, and I love Mary! I just wanted the birth of her Baby to be a special and wonderful event."

Deborah responded, "It'll be a more glorious event than we can imagine."

## **The Birth of the Messiah**

Joseph kindled the two Sabbath candles when they arrived at the *sukkah*. Mary sat on her bed and admired the glowing flames. Between Mary's contractions, Deborah tried to borrow some swaddling cloths and solicit the help of another mid-wife. No one agreed to furnish any cloths and no one consented to assist in the birthing procedure. They were afraid of a repercussion from other's camping in the square. When Deborah returned, she said, "Joseph, please stand outside the entrance. It'll give Mary a little more privacy. The Baby is ready to be born."

Joseph stepped outside and faced northeast. The late evening air was crisp, and the sky was still dark because the full moon had not yet appeared on the horizon. He looked up and saw several bright stars gathered overhead. Three of them were the Wandering Stars that were gathering together a little closer each night. In his mind, he envisioned the priests preparing to kindle wicks on nine vats of oil hanging on posts erected in the Court of the Women for the Festival of *Sukkoth*. The huge wicks were made from the pure white priests' garments that the ministering priests had to remove and leave in the Temple after performing their service. The garments were then torn into swaddling strips, with some being twisted into the wicks, and the rest used to wrap around newborn babies.

When a blissful light began radiating from the Court of the Women at the Temple in Jerusalem,

Joseph's thoughts were subtly interrupted. In previous years he had been in Jerusalem for the lighting of the vats. This year he must watch from a distance. He again looked into the sky. To the east the full moon had begun ascending into the foray of stars. Directly overhead the Three Wandering Stars had formed a distinct triangle in the constellation of Ophiuchus.

NOTE: The LORD created a 13<sup>th</sup> constellation, Ophiuchus (ō-fē-ū'-kūs), to depict the Serpent trying to kill the Man-Child (*Yeshua/Jesus*) as soon as he was born. *The dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born,* Revelation 12:4. *Yeshua/Jesus* was born while the sun was passing through Ophiuchus. In Satan's pre-copypat version of this event (i.e., ancient mythology), the infant Hercules kills two serpent-dragons.

Suddenly, without warning, the glow from the Court of the Women evolved into a glorious cloud that expanded beyond Jerusalem, and flooded the environs surrounding Bethlehem's Square! The Baby cried! The LIGHT OF THE WORLD had arrived at the Appointed Time!

Then Deborah called out, "Joseph! Come here and hold the Baby so I can take care of Mary!"

Joseph took the Baby and held him while Deborah tied off the umbilical cord. Then while she was taking care of Mary, Joseph held the Baby closely, and asked, "Are you going to wrap Him in swaddling strips?"

Deborah replied, "I couldn't find anyone who would give me any. No one thinks Mary's Baby is worthy of being wrapped in the priestly cloths."

"Oh! I just remembered something!" confessed Joseph. "Before we left Zacharias and Elizabeth,



Zacharias gave me a bundle and said to wrap the Baby in it. I had forgotten about it until now. Hold the Baby while I fetch it.” Joseph dug into the donkey’s pack and removed the bundle. As he unfolded the cloth, he exclaimed, “I thought this was a bundle of swaddling strips. Instead it’s an entire high priest’s service garment! It must be the one Zacharias wore when the angel Gabriel appeared to him in the Holy Place. Due to that baffling situation, Zacharias was still wearing it when he was hastily removed from the Sanctuary.”

“The Baby’s getting cold,” complained Deborah. “Let’s just wrap that garment around him for tonight. We can tear it into swaddling strips when the air warms tomorrow.”

Deborah wrapped the Baby in the priest’s garment and placed him in Mary’s arms. Joseph went back outside to continue observing the glowing light emanating from the Temple. But Joseph was not the only one observing the splendorous light. Out in the surrounding hills, near the city of Bethlehem, several shepherds were sipping milk and watching the lights.

### **Shepherds visit the *Sukkah***

The 1<sup>st</sup> shepherd pointed, and said, “Look! I see a man coming toward us. Do you suppose he wants to see the lights from this hill?”

A 2<sup>nd</sup> shepherd said, “He’s going to walk right by us! You there!” he called, “Come and sip some milk with us. This is the best place around

Bethlehem for observing the Temple lights.”

The man turned and walked toward them. When he reached them, he said, “*Shalom!* (Shālōm' means, peace to you). Do you understand why the light is so intense?”

A 3<sup>rd</sup> shepherd answered, “Maybe it’s an omen from *El Shaddai* that something special is about to happen!”

As the light continued to intensify around them the shepherds became quite fearful. “*Don’t be afraid!*” ordered the man. “*Behold! I bring you good tidings of great joy, which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior who is Messiah the LORD. And this will be the sign to you: You’ll find a Babe wrapped in \*a single swaddling cloth, and he’ll be lying in a \*\*feed trough.*”

NOTE: \*At Mount Sinai the LORD told the Israelites, *Ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation,* Exodus 19:6, JPS1955. So wrapping babies in swaddling strips made from discarded priest’s garments was a desirable custom. The Greek words for *a swaddling cloth* in Luke 2:7 & 12 were εσπαργανωσεν & εσπαργανωσενμενον. They are both singular, see *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised*, Moulton, 1978, The Zondervan Corp., page 168. However, on page 372, Moulton uses the plural word σπαργανωω to define swaddling cloth(s), as does Thayer in reference 4683. But according to the Greek text there was only one swaddling cloth. Jesus was likely wrapped in the entire priest’s garment. Apparently the translators translated in keeping with the Jewish custom of wrapping newborn babies in several swaddling strips (one strip would not have been long enough to wrap an entire baby). \*\*The word “manger” was used in various translations of Luke 2:7, because it was assumed the owner of the inn sent them to a stable. But there is no mention of a manger or a stable in Luke. It is more probable Jesus was born in

a *sukkah* and placed in an adjacent feed trough, because according to the Festivals, he was born on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the Feast of Tabernacles, and each Jewish family built a *sukkah* to live in during the 7-days of Tabernacles.

Then the man ascended above them, and their eyes and ears were opened. They saw and heard things normally hidden from the earthly senses of men. The man remained suspended in the light, while thousands of the heavenly host appeared and began praising the Eternal One, saying: *Glory to The Almighty God who dwells in the highest heaven, and may peace abide in those on earth who worship Him.*

When the vision of angels had faded from view the 1<sup>st</sup> shepherd questioned what they had seen, saying, “I wonder if *El Shaddai* wants us to visit His Messiah tonight?”

“I think He does,” answered the 2<sup>nd</sup> shepherd. “The man told us what signs to look for so we would know which Baby is the Messiah.”

The 1<sup>st</sup> shepherd said, “I believe what the angel told us is true. I also believe we’ll find the Baby. If we hurry we may see this wonder that has been made known to us.”

When they reached Bethlehem’s Square they saw the many temporary shelters that had been erected in the square. But only one had the Sabbath candles still burning in it. They approached the *sukkah*, and the 1<sup>st</sup> shepherd said, “We’re shepherds from the hills outside this city. We were told a special Baby has been born in Bethlehem tonight. We stopped at the Inn but the owner was unable to help us. Are

you aware of any?”

Joseph replied, “I’m Joseph the Carpenter, and the only Baby I’m aware of that has been born in Bethlehem tonight is my wife’s Baby.”

“Err....Uh....I....I....think we’d better keep looking,” stammered the shepherd. “The owner of the Inn declared your wife is a harlot! I don’t think *El Shaddai* would allow a harlot to bear His Messiah.”

As the shepherds turned to go, the Baby cried. “Look!” exclaimed the 2<sup>nd</sup> shepherd. “That Baby is lying in a feed trough! And it’s wrapped in a priest’s garment! Do you suppose that’s what the angel meant, when he said the Babe would be wrapped in a single swaddling cloth?”

The 1<sup>st</sup> shepherd said, “This is exactly how the angel said we would recognize the Messiah!”

Deborah stood and offered an explanation. “I’m just a woman and a slave, so you can listen to what I have to say, or simply walk away. She’s not a harlot. On the way here from Babylon I was assigned to be this girl’s handmaid. I found that even though she was with Child and beginning her 9<sup>th</sup> month, she was still a virgin.”

Deborah returned into the *sukkah* and sat down next to Mary. The shepherds stood staring at each other. Suddenly they began shouting praises to the LORD and loudly rejoicing. They realized they had found the Messiah! Many of those sleeping in the numerous nearby *sukkot* (sūk-kōt’; it is the plural form of *sukkah*) awakened, whereupon the shepherds began telling them

what they had seen and heard. Some believed what they were told, but others shook their heads in unbelief. Then for the next 8-days many controversies arose concerning the Baby in Joseph's *sukkah* on the square.

### **The Wise Men find the Messiah**

One week later, Joseph entered the *sukkah*, and said, "I see you've kindled the Sabbath candles, Mary." Then as he took the Baby from Mary's arms, he announced, "The Eighth Day of Tabernacles is about to begin. It's also the eighth night after you were born little boy. I must circumcise you in the morning as commanded in the *Torah* (i.e., the Law of Moses)."

Mary said, "Do you suppose Mordecai and the caravan are still camping on the mountain? Surely they're aware by now that the Messiah won't be born at Bethel."

As the darkness settled in, Deborah served the evening meal. Later, Deborah held the Baby while they conversed about how he was responding to various situations. Then she wrapped the priest's garment around the Baby, and gently placed him in the feed trough that was situated directly in front of the *sukkah*.

"I hope he sleeps all night," said Joseph, as he rolled over on his bedroll and closed his eyes.

Deborah exclaimed, "Many times I wake up and listen for him to cry, just so I can pick him up! But then I must hand him to Mary, because she enjoys holding and feeding him."

Mary extinguished the Sabbath candles. For several minutes she observed the waning half moon as it neared the zenith of the midnight sky, where the three Wandering Stars were now closely conjoining in the constellation of Ophiuchus. Then she reclined on her bed.

Later, the whimpering of the Baby awakened Mary. She gazed through the branches that loosely covered the roof. Above the *sukkah* a very bright light was shining. She arose and stepped outside. After checking to be sure the Baby was secure in the feed trough, she whispered, "Joseph! What's that strange light directly over our *sukkah*?"

Joseph exited the *sukkah* and stood by Mary's side. Then in a tone of wonderment, he said, "The three Wandering Stars are tightly massed in the sky....and their radiance seems to be concentrated into a single moving beam of light!" Moments later he exclaimed, "That moving beam of light has stopped directly over our *sukkah*!"

Joseph and Mary remained quiet as they wondered about the strange phenomenon that was taking place around them. Then without any warning, a man brushed past them and stopped in front of the Baby. Joseph and Mary only saw his back. Suddenly many other men pressed in around the *sukkah*! Then the man in front of them bowed down, and whispered to the Baby, "We've found you at last! You're the Messiah of the Almighty! Blessed be *El Shaddai*, and blessed be the woman who bore you."

Mary recognized the voice, and asked, “Aren’t you Mordecai?”

Mordecai turned, and exclaimed; “Mary! I don’t understand! After the three Wandering Stars had converged into one astral luminary, we followed a moving beam of light radiating from their brilliance. Now it’s concentrated on this very place! The shepherds who joined us as we entered Bethlehem have confirmed this Baby is the Messiah! But the prophet Isaiah declared the mother of the Messiah would be a virgin!”

NOTE: Isaiah 7:14, JPS1955, reads; *The Lord Himself shall give you a sign: behold, \*the young woman shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name \*\*Immanuel.*

\*Prior to the 1<sup>st</sup>Century CE, every young Jewish girl was assumed to be a virgin prior to her marriage to a man; so *the young woman* was correctly translated as *the virgin* in Christian Bibles. If *the young woman* in this verse were not specifically referring to *the virgin*, the text would have read, *the woman*.

\*\*According to 1<sup>st</sup>Enoch 69:14–29, the NAME of the Messiah was hidden since before the foundations of the world were laid. His name *YESHUA* (Jesus) was not revealed until Gabriel enunciated His NAME to Mary. That’s why Isaiah called him *Immanuel* (i.e., GOD with us).

Before Mary could respond, Deborah stepped out from the *sukkah*, and asked, “Master Mordecai, may I speak? I’m only a servant but I have a confession to make that may explain what has taken place.”

Mordecai looked around at those who had pressed in for a glimpse of the Baby in the feed trough. Then he asked, “Will anyone object if I allow Deborah to speak openly to us?”

No one objected, so he said, “You may speak.”

Deborah bowed, and answered, “When Mary joined our caravan you assigned me to care for her. I immediately sensed there was something special about her Baby. Then while I cared for Mary I noted her appearance was pristine, even though she was with Child. I discussed this with the other older women. We all agreed Mary might be carrying the Messiah.”

Mordecai demanded, “Why didn’t you tell me Mary was carrying the Messiah?”

Deborah again bowed, and answered, “We all agreed we should tell you, but fearing we might be stoned as blasphemers we kept the secret. After you sent us on our way from Bethel, Mary admitted to me her mother is a matriarchal granddaughter of Shelomith of the house of Nathan; and her father is a descendant priest from the house of Jehozadak and Aaron, as proclaimed by Zechariah the prophet.”

Mordecai turned to Joseph, and said, “Why didn’t you tell me Mary’s Baby was the Promised Messiah?”

Joseph asked, “Would you have believed me if I had told you? I was sure you would have ejected us from the caravan if I had declared the Baby was the Messiah.” Then he added, “I believe *El Shaddai* sent you all the way from Babylon, just so Mary and I would reach Bethlehem safely.”

Mordecai’s eyes began filling with tears as he looked at Mary, and said, “I purposely made your walk very difficult on that first day! I didn’t want a cognitive woman to be a part of our



caravan. Then I sent you on your way when we arrived at Bethel! If only I had known! We would have carried you all the way to Bethlehem, and then prepared a celebration worthy of our King. He was with us all that time. May *El Shaddai* have mercy on my soul?”

Mary replied, “*El Shaddai* looked kindly on his maid-servant. He sent you to carry me as far as Bethel, and you furnished us with another donkey to carry me to Bethlehem. You also sent Deborah with us. I had a midwife even though none of the midwives in Bethlehem would help us, because they assumed I was a harlot. The night the Messiah was born was peaceful and beautiful. The shepherds saw the hosts of heaven celebrating his birth. When they saw the Baby, they rejoiced and glorified *El Shaddai*. Nothing could have exceeded that celebration!”

Then Joseph added, “You have arrived in time to celebrate His circumcision. *Shemini Atzeret* (shē-mē-nē' ātz-ēr-ēt') arrived at sundown, and it's the 8<sup>th</sup> day since the Baby's birth. So, tomorrow morning he'll be circumcised on this Lunar High Sabbath, which is also a 7<sup>th</sup> day Solar Sabbath.”

NOTE: *Shemini Atzeret* is translated in Christian Bibles as *The Eighth Day*. It is always observed on Tishri 22, which is the day following the 7<sup>th</sup> day of *Sukkoth*. It is also called *The Eighth Day of Sukkoth*. *Shemini Atzeret* means, *The Eighth Assembly*. The yearly reading of the *Torah* at the Temple was completed on this day. This custom is still observed in Jewish Synagogues today.

Mordecai responded, “Bring the Baby out by the Inn. You and Mary will move out of the *Sukkah* as is customary on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, and into

my daughter's tent, which I will have erected for the ceremony.”

### **The Circumcision of the Messiah**

The following morning Joseph sat down on a rock in front of the tent, and asked, “Mordecai, the three of us would like to know how you finally determined where to look for the Messiah?”

Mordecai sat down and began his explanation. “Prior to the Festival of *Sukkoth*, we searched for the Virgin on the Mountain of Bethel, and even in the city of Bethel-Luz. All the while, the three Wandering Stars continued to draw closer to each other in the heavens. We were certain the Messiah would be born on that very mountain. But on the first night of *Sukkoth* we beheld a glorious cloud above Jerusalem. It extended into the environs surrounding the city. We realized the Messiah had been born; but not at Bethel!”

Mordecai put his face into his hands for a few moments in order to regain his composure. Then he continued, “During the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup> day of *Sukkoth*, we entered Jerusalem. We asked the elders sitting at the gate, where the one who had been born the King of the Jews was residing. After much discussion, they dispatched a messenger to King Herod to enquire if a baby had been born in his palace. The messenger returned and declared none had been born there, but King Herod wanted to know who was asking this question, and why. We sent word to

Herod that we were descendent sons of King Hezekiah that he had sent to Babylon before the Captivity. When we saw the Messiah's Star we left for Jerusalem so we could worship him.

“During the next afternoon, Herod demanded the Sanhedrin convene a special session. He wanted to know where the Messiah was supposed to be born. They gave him their answer around noon of the next day. That same night, King Herod secretly sent for us to meet him just inside the city wall. During that meeting, a young Scribe named Nicodemus, informed us of the conclusion reached by the Sanhedrin. He told us Micah prophesied: *But thou Beth-lehem Ephra-thah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from ancient days* (Micah 5:1, JPS 1955; it is Micah 5:2 in Christian Bibles).

“We advised Herod we saw his star nine months ago, when he was conceived during the Festival of *Hanukkah*. Herod asked us to go to Bethlehem and find the Baby, and to bring him word of where the Child was residing, so he could come and worship him.”

After a short period of silence, Joseph announced, “It's time for the Ritual to begin!”

Everyone gathered around the Baby as He lay in the feed trough by the open end of the *sukkah*. When the Baby was circumcised, Joseph enunciated his Hebrew name:

## “Yeshua!”

Mordecai affirmed; “Enoch, the 7<sup>th</sup> Patriarch from Adam, declared the NAME of the Messiah had been hidden since before the foundations of the earth were laid (Enoch 69:13–25). At the exact moment the angel Gabriel enunciated His NAME, **Yeshua** (Jesus), to Mary on that 1<sup>st</sup> night of *Hanukkah*, the conception of the Messiah began! Mary was the first to hear His NAME pronounced before any other man or angel in the universe! And now Joseph has announced His NAME for the entire world to hear and sing his praises!”

Following Mordecai’s announcement, the Wise Men approached the young Child one at a time, and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

NOTE: A Jewish baby was considered to be a 1<sup>st</sup> year baby at birth. At the following Passover it would become a 2<sup>nd</sup> year baby. Therefore, when *Yeshua*/Jesus was less than 6-months old, he was considered to be “up to two years old.” So Herod only killed the babies born after the previous Passover. A more detailed and documented story is included in *Forty-Two Months and Ten Toes, The Perfect Jewish Calendar*.

*The heavens declare the Glory of GOD,  
And the expanse of the skies  
proclaim the work of His Hands.  
Day after day they pour forth speech,  
Night after night they reveal knowledge.  
There is neither speech nor language where their  
voice is not heard.*

Paraphrased from Psalm 19:1-3, NIV and NKJV  
including center references