

COMMEMORATION OF

JESUS' BIRTHDAY, AUGUST 21, 1966

Today, it is our great privilege to gather here together to commemorate the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. ~~On August 21, 7 B.C.~~ on August 21, 7 B.C. at noontime, Jesus was born of Mary, and on the eighth day according to Jewish practice he was christened and formally named Joshua ben Joseph. Page 1351.

Last year at this time, Georgia Gecht presented a scholarly and beautiful paper on the Cosmic Career of Michael. Here, she described the background which preceded the last bestowal, leading from the original birth and heritage on Paradise through the seven bestowals wherein Michael earned the supreme sovereignty or his Master Sonship.

With that thorough and fascinating description of the cosmic career of Michael as a background, we will now proceed to certain events of the birth and life of Joshua ben Joseph as he lived on our small and backward planet called Urantia. This is a story familiar to us all but one of which we never tire — one so simple, and yet one so very complex in its meaning and implications, not only to us but to the entire universe.

There are many reasons which led to the selection of Palestine as the land for Michael's last bestowal and especially to why the family of Joseph and Mary should have been chosen as the immediate personal setting for the appearance of this Son of God on Urantia.

Gabriel made a personal visit to Urantia after Michael had selected it for his final bestowal. As a result of Gabriel's study of human groups and his "survey of the spiritual, intellectual, racial and geographic features of the world and its people, he decided that the Hebrews possessed those relative advantages which warranted their selection as the bestowal race." 1344. What a superb compliment to the Jewish people, that they, out of all the peoples of this planet should be selected as the most superior to nurture and care for the Creator of the Universe!

"Gabriel then appointed and dispatched to Urantia the Family Commission of Twelve -- selected from the higher orders of universe personalities -- which was intrusted with the task of making an investigation of Jewish family life. When this commission ended its labors, Gabriel was present on Urantia and received the report nominating three prospective unions as being, in the opinion of the commission, equally favorable as bestowal families for Michael's projected incarnation! 1344:2

From the three couples nominated, Gabriel made the personal choice of Joseph and Mary, subsequently making his personal appearance to Mary, at which time he imparted to her the glad tidings that she had been selected to become the earth mother of the bestowal child. 1344:3

Mary and Joseph had been married in March 8 B.C. at the home of Mary's parents near Nazareth when Joseph was 21 years old. When he was a young man he had been employed by Mary's father in the work of building an addition to his house and it was during a noontime meal when Mary brought Joseph a cup of water that their courtship began. This courtship was of two years duration.

The following November in 8 B.C. Gabriel made his appearance to Mary. This is so vividly described on page 1346:5.

"One evening about sundown, before Joseph had returned home, Gabriel appeared to Mary by the side of a low stone table and, after she had recovered her composure, said: "I come at the bidding of one who is my Master and whom you shall love and nurture. To you, Mary, I bring glad tidings when I announce that the conception within you is ordained by heaven, and that in due time you will become the mother of a son; you shall call him Joshua, and he shall inaugurate the kingdom of heaven on earth and among men. Speak not of this matter save to Joseph and Elizabeth, your kinswoman, to whom I have also appeared, and who shall presently bear a son, whose name shall be John, and who will prepare the way for the message of deliverance which your son shall proclaim to men with great power and deep conviction. And doubt not my word, Mary, for this home has been chosen as the mortal habitat of the child of destiny. My benediction rests upon you, the power of the Most Highs will strengthen you, and the Lord of all the earth shall overshadow you."

" Gabriel's announcement to Mary was made the day following the conception of Jesus and was the only event of supernatural occurrence connected with her entire experience of carrying and bearing the child of promise," 1347:3

"Mary pondered this visitation secretly in her heart for many weeks until of a certainty she knew she was with child, before she dared to disclose these unusual events to her husband. When Joseph heard all about this, although he had great confidence in Mary, he was much troubled and could not sleep for many nights." 1347. Joseph did not become reconciled to the idea that Mary was to become the mother of an extraordinary child until after he had experienced a very impressive dream. In this dream a brilliant celestial messenger appeared to him and, among other things, said, "Joseph, I appear to you by command of Him who now reigns on high, and I am directed to instruct you concerning the son whom Mary shall bear, and who shall become the light of mankind. He shall first come to his own people but they will hardly receive him; but to as many as shall receive him, to them will he reveal that they are the children of God." After this experience Joseph never again wholly doubted Mary's story of Gabriel's visit and of the promise that the unborn child was to become a divine messenger to the world." 1347

The Home at Nazareth (See Map)

The home of Joseph and Mary was not far from the high hill in the northerly part of Nazareth, some distance from the village spring, which was in the eastern section of the town. Jesus' family dwelt in the outskirts of the city, and this made it all the easier for him subsequently to enjoy frequent strolls in the country and to make trips up to the top of this nearby highland, the highest of all the hills of southern Galilee save the Mount Tabor range to the east and the hill of Nain, which was about the same height. Their home was located a little to the south and east of the southern promontory of this hill (which was north) and about midway between the base of this elevation and the road leading out to Nazareth toward Cana. Aside from climbing the hill, Jesus' favorite stroll was to follow a narrow trail winding about the base of the hill in a northeasterly direction to a point where it joined the road to Sepphoris." 1350

The Trip to Bethlehem (See map)

"In the month of March 8, B.C (the month Joseph and Mary were married) Caesar Augustus decreed that all inhabitants of the Roman Empire should be numbered, that a census should be made which could be used for effecting better taxation. The Jews had always been greatly prejudiced against any attempt to "number the people", and this, in connection with the serious domestic difficulties of Herod, King of Judea, had conspired to cause the postponement of the taking of this census in the Jewish kingdom for one year. Throughout all the Roman Empire this census was registered in the year 8 B.C., except in the Palestinian kingdom of Herod, where it was taken in 7 B.C., one year later.

"It was not necessary that Mary should go to Bethlehem for enrollment - - Joseph was authorized to register for the family - but Mary, being an adventurous and aggressive person insisted on accompanying him. She feared being left alone lest the child be born while Joseph was away, and again, Bethlehem being not far from the City of Judah, Mary foresaw a possible pleasurable visit with her kinswoman Elizabeth.

"Joseph virtually forbade Mary to accompany him but to no avail; when the food was packed for the trip of three or four days, she prepared double rations and made ready for the journey. But before they actually set forth, Joseph was reconciled to Mary's going along, and they cheerfully departed from Nazareth at the break of day." 1350:6

"Joseph and Mary were poor, and since they had only one beast of burden, Mary, being large with child, rode on the animal with the provisions while Joseph walked, leading the beast. The building and furnishing of a home had been a great drain on Joseph since he had also to contribute to the support of his parents, as his father had recently been disabled. And so this Jewish couple went forth from their humble home early on the morning of August 18, 7 B.C., on their journey to Bethlehem. 1350 last.

Their first day of travel carried them around the foothills of Mount Gilboa, where they camped for the night by the river Jordan and engaged in many speculations as to what sort of a son would be born to them, Joseph adhering to the concept of a spiritual teacher and Mary holding to the idea of a Jewish Messiah, a deliverer of the Hebrew nation.

Bright and early the morning of August 19, Joseph and Mary were again on their way. They partook of their noontide meal at the foot of Mount Sartaba, overlooking the Jordan valley, and journeyed on, making Jericho for the night, where they stopped at an inn on the outskirts of the city. Following the evening meal and after much discussion concerning the oppressiveness of the Roman rule, Herod, the census enrollment, and the comparative influence of Jerusalem and Alexandria as centers of Jewish learning and culture, the Nazareth travelers retired for the night's rest. Early in the morning of August 20 they resumed their journey, reaching Jerusalem before noon, visiting the temple, and going on to their destination, arriving at Bethlehem in midafternoon.

"The inn was overcrowded, and Joseph accordingly sought lodgings with distant relatives, but every room in Bethlehem was filled to overflowing. On returning to the courtyard of the inn, he was informed that the caravan stables, hewn out of the side of the rock and situated just below the inn, had been cleared of animals and cleaned up for the reception of lodgers. Leaving the donkey in

the courtyard, Joseph shouldered their bags of clothing and provisions and with Mary descended the stone steps to their lodgings below. They found themselves located in what had been a grain storage room to the front of the stalls and mangers. Tent curtains had been hung, and they counted themselves fortunate to have such comfortable quarters.

Joseph had thought to go out at once and enroll, but Mary was weary; she was considerably distressed and besought him to remain by her side, which he did.

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All that night Mary was restless so that neither of them slept much. By the break of day the pangs of childbirth were well in evidence and at noon, August 21, 7 B.C., with the help and kind ministrations of women fellow travelers Mary was delivered of a male child. Jesus of Nazareth was born into the world wrapped in the clothes which Mary had brought along for such a possible contingency, and laid in a near-by manger.

In just the same manner as all babies before that day and since have come into the world, the promised child was born; and on the eighth day, according to the Jewish practice, he was circumcised and formally named Joshua (Jesus).

The next day after the birth of Jesus, Joseph made his enrollment. Meeting a man they had talked with two nights previously at Jericho, Joseph was taken by him to a well-to-do friend who had a room at the inn, and who said he would gladly exchange quarters with the Nazareth couple. That afternoon they moved up to the inn, where they lived for almost three weeks until they found lodgings in the home of a distant relative of Joseph.

The second day after the birth of Jesus, Mary sent word to Elizabeth that her child had come and received word in return inviting Joseph up to Jerusalem to talk over all their affairs with Zacharias. The following week Joseph went to Jerusalem to confer with Zacharias. Both Zacharias and Elizabeth had become possessed with the sincere conviction that Jesus was indeed to become the Jewish deliverer, the Messiah, and that their son John was to be his chief of aides, his right-hand man of destiny. And since Mary held these same ideas it was not difficult to prevail upon Joseph to remain in Bethlehem, the City of David, so that Jesus might grow up to become the successor of David on the throne of all Israel. Accordingly, they remained in Bethlehem more than a year, Joseph meantime working some at his carpenter's trade.

At the noontide birth of Jesus the seraphim of Urantia, assembled under their directors, did sing anthems of glory over the Bethlehem manger, but these utterances of praise were not heard by human ears. No shepherds nor any other mortal creatures came to pay homage to the babe of Bethlehem until the day of the arrival of certain priests from Ur, who were sent down from Jerusalem by Zacharias.

These priests from Mesopotamia had been told sometime before by a strange religious teacher of their country that he had had a dream in which he was informed that "the light of life" was about to appear on earth as a babe and among the Jews. And thither went these three teachers looking for this "light of life." After many weeks of futile search in Jerusalem, they were about to return to Ur when Zacharias met them and disclosed his belief that

Jesus was the object of their quest and sent them on to Bethlehem, where they found the babe and left their gifts with Mary, his earth mother. The babe was almost three weeks old at the time of their visit.

These wise men saw no star to guide them to Bethlehem. The beautiful legend of the star of Bethlehem originated in this way: Jesus was born August 21 at noon, 7 B.C. On May 29, 7 B.C., there occurred an extraordinary conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces. And it is a remarkable astronomic fact that similar conjunctions occurred on September 29 and December 5 of the same year. Upon the basis of these extraordinary but wholly natural events the well-meaning zealots of the succeeding generation constructed the appealing legend of the star of Bethlehem and the adoring Magi led thereby to the manger, where they beheld and worshiped the newborn babe. Oriental and near-Oriental minds delight in fairy stories, and they are continually spinning such beautiful myths about the lives of their religious leaders and political heroes. In the absence of printing, when most human knowledge was passed by word of mouth from one generation to another, it was very easy for myths to become traditions and for traditions eventually to become accepted as facts.

The Life of Jesus

"Of all human knowledge that which is of greatest value is to know the religious life of Jesus and how he lived it! Page 2090:4

That short quotation is the message which I would like to leave with you on this birthday of the Master. We who are so fortunate as to be able to read and ponder over the enlarged version and description of the religious life of Jesus are indeed fortunate. We can thank God daily for this tremendous privilege. Think of the multitudes of human beings on this planet who have not had this glorious opportunity! We must not only use this great privilege to the fullest by continuous study but it is our joy to bring this message to as many hungry souls as possible while we yet live here.

To continue with the quotation which I have selected for today's message. On page 2090:4 we read: "One of the most important things in human living is to find out what Jesus believed to discover his life purpose. To follow Jesus" means to personally share his religious faith and to enter into the spirit of the Master's life of unselfish service for man."

"Jesus founded the religion of personal experience in doing the will of God and serving human brotherhood." 2092:4

"The struggling and valiant human Jesus of Galilee, by the valor of his personal religious faith and the heroism of his indwelling Adjuster, ascended from the lowly levels of humanity to become one with divinity, thus becoming the new and living way whereby all mortals may so ascend from humanity to divinity." 2092:3

"The ultimate goal of society's most advanced achievement can never hope to transcend Jesus' brotherhood of men based on the recognition of the fatherhood of God." 2093.