

Christmas Today
By Wayne Vasilenko

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It is the month of December, the time of year in which many people's thoughts are directed towards some of the Bible's most important prophecies pertaining to humanity, the ones concerning the birth of a child who was destined to be the Messiah (or Savior) of the world. All of these prophecies have been fulfilled in minute detail. The "Christmas Story," was and is however, just the beginnings of many more fulfillments of prophesy concerning the Messiah. Many people these days do not realize that the birth of that child, whose name is Jesus had been foretold, in some instances thousands of years before it took place! Additionally, what happened afterward pertaining to His life and ministry had also been foretold; once again, in minute detail. It all took place for both you and for me... for *our* reconciliation to God! I have said it many times, "If it weren't for prophesy, Jesus is just another man." This Christmas season, it is my hope and prayer that once again we will all begin to focus on the true meaning of the Christmas Story. You can rest assured of the validity of this story, as historical records indicate that it happened *exactly* as the Bible said it would. You can also rest assured that prophecies in the Bible not yet fulfilled, concerning both Jesus and "end time events" will happen likewise, *exactly* as stated by God through those He appointed as Prophets! In the course of this writing, we will look at just a few of the predictions in the Bible concerning the Messiah, along with their fulfillments.

Before we do that, let us take a moment and reflect a little... what are some of your most cherished memories of the Christmas season as you grew up over the years? For some of us, me included, those memories go back many years (well over sixty in my case). For those much younger, some of my memories may seem ancient, almost otherworldly, as some younger people have had virtually no exposure to the origins of the celebrations associated with the Christmas Season. Many younger people simply know it as "The Holiday Season" with no reference to Jesus at all! Growing up with a Catholic and Russian Orthodox influence, I personally have had some limited exposure early on as to the true Christmas Story pertaining to the birth of Jesus. Nevertheless, as a child, the "Santa Claus" side of it got much more of my attention as it did with most people both young and old alike, just as it continues to do today. Many religions try to reconcile the two by proclaiming that it is a season to consider the giving of gifts as a reflection of the "Gift of Salvation" which Jesus brought to us though undeserved, giving us good reason to be joyous because none of us can ever be "Good Enough" to earn our salvation. Perhaps this is where the concept of Santa's "Naughty or Nice List" got its start... Nevertheless, giving one's life for an undeserving recipient as Jesus came to do is a lot different than deciding whether one deserves a toy, a new iPhone, or a Lump of Coal based on one's social or moral performance. Jesus came and did what He did although none of us deserved anything much less the sacrifice His innocent life as payment for our personal transgressions against God and His laws! Still others may equate the giving of gifts as a remembrance of the gifts the "Wise Men" brought to Jesus. Just for the record, the "Wise Men" did not present their gifts at the manger as has been taught over the years! The passage below refers to them coming into a house, and more than likely, this took place days, possibly even a few years after the actual birth of the Christ Child! In addition, there could have been more than three Wise Men; the belief that there were only three is based solely on the number of gifts mentioned that they presented.

Matthew 2:9-11 (NKJV)

⁹ When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. ¹¹ And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

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Now, let us take a look at a few prophecies.

Keep in mind over 25% of the Bible contains Prophecy!

A Prophecy

The Messiah Born of a Virgin

Isaiah 7:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

(Immanuel also spelled with an E when translated from the Greek means "God With Us")

This prophecy was considered an impossibility even in ancient times as the response by Mary to the Angel Gabriel's announcement implies. What are the odds of a Virgin giving birth? Someone today may argue that we might consider "In Vitro Fertilization" as a way for a virgin to conceive, but get real... we're talking two thousand years ago and trust me... no "Ancient Aliens" were involved. I suppose Mary's experience did involve In Vitro Fertilization in a sense, but the only human involved was Mary and the fertilization took place solely by the will of God through the Holy Spirit.

The Fulfillment

The Messiah Born of a Virgin

Luke 1:26-42 (NKJV)

²⁶ Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored *one*, the Lord *is* with you; blessed *are* you among women!" ²⁹ But when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. ³⁰ Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³ And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" ³⁵ And the angel answered and said to her, "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.* ³⁶ Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. ³⁷ For with God nothing will be impossible." ³⁸ Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. ³⁹ Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰ and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb!

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A Prophecy
The Messiah born in Bethlehem

Micah 5:2 (NKJV)

² "But you, Bethlehem ***Ephrathah***^{*}, *Though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, *Yet* out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth *are* from of old, From everlasting." (*Emphasis Mine)

Jewish leaders considered this a Messianic prophecy. To reinforce this statement read the following exchange between King Herod and the Wise Men who came seeking the Messiah, followed by Herod's consultation with the Priests, Scribes, and Pharisees:

Matthew 2:1-6 (NKJV)

¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." ³ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: ⁶ *'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'* "

This sets the stage for the Christmas Story most people are familiar with concerning the birth of Jesus. Even I As a child in the Catholic Church noticed that there was a big emphasis on this town called Bethlehem. At the time, I didn't have a clue as to what the significance of this was. However, the prophecy in Micah 5:2 tells us where the coming Messiah (or Savior) would be born... in Bethlehem. This was spoken I might add, hundreds of years before the fulfillment which we will examine next. The main point to focus on is the fact that prophecy as to where the Messiah would be born was very specific (more than most realize as you will see below) and it was universally accepted as being the words spoken by the prophet Micah.

The Fulfillment
The Messiah born in Bethlehem

Luke 2:4-7 (NKJV)

⁴ Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. ⁶ So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. ⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

So here we have the fulfillment of Micah's prophecy, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but there are many more details contained in these verses that many overlook. First, consider this... what are the odds of Jesus being born in Bethlehem? Some might say for the sake of argument, "There's a One in Ten Thousand chance of Jesus being born there." Most can agree with these odds however, here is a detail in Micah's prophecy many overlook... he stated, "Bethlehem, ***Ephrathah!***" There were two Bethlehem's in the region and the one linked to the Tribe of Judah was the one known as "Ephrath." (see Genesis 35:19) Micah specifically states that it will be Bethlehem ***Ephrathah*** where the Messiah will be born...

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exactly where Jesus was born! What does that do to the odds of this happening by chance, one in twenty thousand... or more? When you consider all the events that took place with Joseph and Mary leading up to this fulfillment of prophesy the odds become astronomical! For example, the odds of Jesus fulfilling just 8 prophesies concerning His birth are (1×10^{17}) , and Jesus' birth as it happened, fulfilled well over 100 messianic prophesies concerning His lineage, life, and ministry. It makes you wonder what those odds are.

A Heartrending Experience

I recently went with my wife to a large hobby store she frequents. She was looking for a few items for a project she is working on. It was the first week of December, just a few days after the infamous, "Black Friday" the so-called biggest "Christmas" shopping day of the year. Everywhere I looked, I could see the "Christmas Theme" depicted in every item in sight. This mind you, is a big store, as big as the average Wal-Mart type store, and I would venture to say that at least 1/3 of the store was dedicated to the soon to come Christmas holiday season! Two isles at least 40 feet long were stocked with every type of Christmas light you could imagine; another isle the same size contained nothing but Santa statues of every type and size along with like isles containing reindeer, elves, and candy canes! There was also a huge section dedicated solely to inflatable lawn decorations. There were Santa's and Snowmen, some at least 15 feet high... there was even a Dragon! (I am still puzzled about that one) I could go on and on, but the saddening part is that out of all these "Christmas Decorations" there was only one 5 ft x 6 foot shelf unit in the middle of one isle with perhaps a total count of forty decorations depicting what Christmas is really supposed to be about. Out of so many isles of decorations, this lone shelf unit had a handful of "Manger Scenes" with a few statues of Baby Jesus with Mary and Joseph! I stood quietly and stared at that meager display for five – perhaps ten minutes asking myself, "What has become of Christmas?" I have long ago accepted Jesus as my savior... I know what the Christmas Story is really all about, it's about the greatest gift humanity has ever received... the "Gift" of Salvation! This gift came to us in the form of a baby named Jesus, also called Emmanuel who was really God Himself... Remember Emmanuel actually means "God with us."

Perhaps this is the first time you have heard of the prophesies concerning Jesus, "The Real Christmas Story." Perhaps over the years although you knew the true story, it was put on the back burner so to speak as the "Holiday Hype" of Santa and all the presents overwhelmed you. We only covered two prophesies concerning the Messiah in this study... there are well over a thousand concerning Jesus, why He came, His ministry, and also concerning things to come that affect all of us right now as many prophesies are being fulfilled right before our eyes... you can see them in the daily news! This study has given you a small glimpse of the truth about Christmas, and what it means to me.

Therefore, the question for you now is, "What does Christmas mean to you?"

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year
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