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The Miracles of Christmas - Part 2

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"A miracle is generally defined, according to the etymology of the word – it comes from the Greek 'thaumasion' and the Latin 'miraculum' – as that which causes wonder and astonishment, being extraordinary in itself and amazing or inexplicable by normal standards. Because that which is normal and usual is also considered as natural, miracles have occasionally been defined as supernatural events, but this definition presupposes a very specific conception of nature and natural laws and cannot, therefore, be generally applied. The significance of a miraculous event is frequently held to reside not in the event as such but in the reality to which it points (e.g., the presence or activity of a divine power); thus, a miracle is also called a sign – from the Greek 'semeion' (biblical Hebrew 'to') – signifying and indicating something beyond itself." Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/topic/miracle>

The above definition from Britannica online implies that a miracle does not necessarily have to be a supernatural event. It says that any event that is unusual but points to a divine power can be called a miracle. That is true to some extent. Not all phenomena that people of faith (any faith) may ascribe to God or gods necessarily defy natural law. Nonetheless, they can see God's hands in the circumstances surrounding the event as having a divine purpose that they can interpret as miraculous.

That being said, there are many instances recorded in the Bible that are clearly beyond the normal scope of natural occurrences and therefore must be regarded as genuinely supernatural. Of course, people with a naturalistic worldview will deny that any event can ever be regarded as authentically supernatural, since everything that happens has to fall with the unalterable boundaries of natural law and the material universe. In many articles on this website we have shown the serious fallacies of the naturalistic worldview. There are simply too many recognized phenomena that cannot be explained by a naturalistic approach. Three examples are the creation of the universe from nothing, the origin of life, and the mystery of quantum particle entanglement.

In this two-part series, we are examining six events recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke associated with the season of Christmas that are clearly supernatural forms of miracles. In the first installment, Part 1, we surveyed three miraculous occurrences (see <https://www.marketfaith.org/2025/12/the-miracles-of-christmas-part-1-tal-davis/>). First were those surrounding the conception and birth of John the Baptist (Luke

1:5-25 and 57-80). Second, was the miraculous announcement by Gabriel to Mary that she would be the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:28-33). Then third, we particularly analyzed the amazing miraculous conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit with the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:34-38; Matthew 1:20-21).

In this Part 2, we will look at three more significant miracles that center on the birth of Christ. We start with that event itself.

MIRACLE 4: The Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem

The accounts of Jesus' birth in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are both rather brief. Nonetheless, we can see the miraculous hand of God at work in the circumstances of that great event. Matthew 1:18-25 does not really give any details of the actual birth itself, only, as we looked at earlier, that the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream to inform him that Mary's pregnancy was a miracle. The angel related to Joseph that this was to fulfill a prophecy from Isaiah 7:14: "Behold, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son, and they shall name Him Immanuel," which translated means, 'God with us.'" (Matthew 1:23 NASB) Joseph then unquestionably took her as his wife.

Matthew does give one other piece of information in verse 25 that we should note. He says Joseph "kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he named Him Jesus." Nowhere in the New Testament does it say that Mary remained a virgin for the rest of her life. In fact, in several places we are introduced to the actual brothers and sisters of Jesus. (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3) It is also a well established fact that James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem after Pentecost and the author of the letter of that name, was the brother of Jesus. He was skeptical of Jesus' Messiahship until after he witnessed the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7).

Luke, on the other hand, does offer more detailed material on the birth of Jesus story in Luke 2:1-7. It is one we are all quite familiar with from our childhoods from nativity pageants and songs. Those, however, are usually embellished. Let's examine this simple story for miraculous occurrences. First, Luke says that it took place when Caesar Augustus was emperor of Rome and ordered a census be taken of all the world for tax purposes. For that reason everyone in the empire would have to travel to their family's city of origin to register. For Joseph, who lived in Nazareth in Galilee, it meant he and his pregnant wife Mary would have to go to Bethlehem in Judea. This was

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no mere coincidence in God's timing. It had miraculous importance. It was prophesied that the coming Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), so somehow Mary would have to be there at the right moment, which she was!

This journey of the couple from Nazareth to Jerusalem is the focus of many mistaken ideas.

For instance, nowhere does Luke say that Mary rode on a donkey or used any other means of transportation. The common image of Joseph leading the donkey with Mary on its back is only based on an assumption that, being pregnant, she would not be able to walk the whole way. Also, nowhere does Luke mention an innkeeper, only that there was no room in the inn. Inns in New Testament times often were nothing more than walled-in areas with a well for travelers to sleep and drink. If they had animals, they would stay with them. Some houses, however, did open small areas in their courtyards to travelers.

In any case Luke says that she delivered her first born son and, wherever they wound up staying, it had a feeding trough (manger) in which they laid the baby Jesus (vs. 2:7, 16). Mangers were usually hewn out of stone and found in various places, including caves, streets, and houses. As we said before, there was really nothing miraculous about Jesus' birth. It was as normal as any human's could be. The miracle was His virgin conception. That being said, some miraculous events did take place around and after His birth, as we shall see.

Miracle 5: The Announcement of Jesus' Birth to the Shepherds

In Luke 2:8-13, the Gospel writer shifts the scene from Bethlehem to the nearby hillsides where a group of shepherds were guarding their flocks against the dangers of wild animals or thieves. In Bible times, shepherds were common in Judea. In this account, Luke describes the announcement to these lowly shepherds of the birth of the Messiah and how they reacted.

Luke describes how an angel of the Lord appeared to them out in the field. Luke says they were "terribly frightened." Here again we see a miraculous appearance of one of God's messengers. And, as with Zechariah and Mary, their immediate response was terror. Seeing supernatural beings would naturally arise fear in any rational person.

There were good reasons for God to go first to the shepherds. One explanation was the kind of king Jesus was going to become. Jesus did not come to be a political or military ruler. He came to be the Savior for all people from their sins. His kingdom is not of this world. Thus the shepherds

represented the common people for whom Jesus came to give His life.

Another reason the angels went to the shepherds was because of the kinds of people they were. Shepherds were often regarded as despised and morally unclean. They were considered untrustworthy, were shunned socially, were badly paid, and were just plain poor. They were considered ritually unclean, and so were not even allowed to enter the Jerusalem temple.

Despite their social standing, the angel, nonetheless, spoke to them and assured them: *10 "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."* (vs. 10-12 NASB)

The shepherds then saw multitudes of angels praising God. What they were saying is stated in verse 14. You may have wondered why various English translations report it differently.

The best known traditional wording is what often quoted from the King James Version (and is in the New KJV): *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."* Most newer versions have a different emphasis in the translation. The New American Standard Bible says: *"Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."*

The New International Version has it this way: *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."* The Christian Standard Bible says: *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people He favors!"*

So why the difference? The footnotes from the online New American Bible (revised edition) explain it this way:

"On earth peace to those on whom his favor rests' (or 'whom He is pleased'): the peace that results from the Christ event is for those whom God has favored with his grace. This reading is found in the oldest representatives of the Western and Alexandrian text traditions and is the preferred one; the (late) Byzantine text tradition, on the other hand, reads: 'on earth peace, good will toward men.'" (https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A14&version=NABRE)

Miracle 6: The Star of Bethlehem and the Magi

In Matthew's Gospel, the birth of Jesus is told in chapter 1, verses 18-25. Chapter 2 begins some time after Jesus' birth – perhaps as long as a year or more. In that chapter (vss. 1-12) we find mentioned a group of "wise men" who traveled to Bethlehem to see the new King of the Jews. So, just who were

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these men and why did they come? In this section we will look at who and what they were, and ask if any miraculous occurrences were associated with them.

Before we go on, though, let's begin by correcting a couple of false notions about who these "wise men" were. They were actually professional star gazers known as Magi (plural of Latin: Magus - from where we get the word "magic"; Greek: *magos*). The King James Version translates it as "Wise Men."

The Magi mentioned in Matthew were a class of astrologers, priests, and wise men. They probably lived in ancient Persia (modern Iran) or Babylon (modern Iraq). They came to Jerusalem to inquire about a new king being born. So how did they know? The text says they had seen his star "in the east" and came to worship him. The phrase "in the east" (vs. 2) does not mean the Magi were looking in the eastern sky and saw the star, otherwise they would have gone in the wrong direction (Jerusalem was to their west). It probably means that they were located "in the east" when they saw it in the west. Remember, they were astrologers and constantly looked for portents in the heavens. In any case, God apparently had miraculously placed this "Star of Bethlehem" in the sky to guide them to seek Jesus.

Another mistaken concept we need to address is the fact that Matthew nowhere says how many Magi there were, or that they rode on camels. Verse 1 simply reports that at some point they had seen the star and traveled to Jerusalem to find the king of the Jews. Why? Verse 2 says they wanted to worship Him. Not only do the Scriptures not say how many Magi there were, they also make no mention of the Magis' names. The three names some traditionally identify them by, Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar, were legendary, and actually originated much later. Those names have no basis in Scripture or history.

Whoever they were, the Magi went first to see King Herod I in Jerusalem. This was the infamous "Herod the Great" who ruled Judea under the Roman aegis from 37 BC

until his death in 4 BC. He was called "Great" only because of the ambitious building programs he initiated during his rule. He rebuilt and expanded the Jerusalem Temple, built a fortress on the mount of Masada, and constructed a major seaport at Caesarea. Nonetheless, Herod is better known for his murderous behavior fueled by a paranoid fear of those around him. At one point, according to Roman historians, in a fit of anger, he even had his wife and other members of his family killed.

When Herod heard that the Magi were in Jerusalem, he called them in to see him. He told them to go to Bethlehem, which was where the Scriptures said the Messiah was to be born (vs. 6; Micah 5:2). Herod wanted them to find the child, whom he regarded as a threat to his rule, so he could kill Him (vs. 8). This led to what may have been Herod's wickedest act, the slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16-18). Jesus was spared because an angel of the Lord again miraculously spoke to Joseph in a dream and told him to take his family to Egypt. The family remained there until Herod's death in 4 BC (Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23). (By the way, this event provides a clue as to the date for the birth of Jesus. Since Herod died in 4 BC, and Jesus was at least one or two years old when the Magi found Him, then Jesus would have had to be born in either 6 or 5 BC.)

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Soon after the Magi arrived, they noticed that the star had moved and rested over Bethlehem. Just exactly what this star was has been a point of controversy for centuries. Some have argued that it was a comet, others say it was a super nova. Others say it was a special miraculous divine manifestation, perhaps like the *shekinah*, sent to guide the magi. Whatever it was, they followed it to the town and located the house where Mary, Joseph, and the child Jesus then lived.

We are told that the Magi brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (vs. 11). This may be why the tradition arose that there were "three kings." In any case, they were warned in a dream to not go back to Herod. The text does not actually say who warned them in the dream. The KJV and NASB translators assumed it was "by God," but that phrase is not in the Greek text (as indicated in the NASB with italics). Regardless of who gave them the warning, they heeded it and headed home a different way avoiding Jerusalem (vs. 12).

So what can we learn from the Magi's visit? First, the Magi were not Jews, so they really could not have fully understood what was at stake in Jesus' birth. Nevertheless, they had a deep passion for finding the truth about God. They were even willing to leave their homes and search for many miles, and probably months, to find the Messiah. It also indicates that by putting the star in the sky for the Magi to see, God intends salvation in Christ to be available for all peoples – Jews and Gentiles alike. Even now our eternal destiny depends on Him. Therefore, we all should be like the shepherds and the Magi. We should all search for the King!

This concludes this two part study of the Miracles of Christmas. It is our hope that they will help to enlighten your celebration this year of the truly miraculous birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.