

CHRISTMASTIME

In the summer of the year 5 B.C., an obscure young woman from Nazareth, engaged to be married, turned up pregnant before the wedding date. This was not unique among women in that day. It had happened before. The man to whom she was engaged was hurt, shocked and ashamed. Then the anger came. The one in whom he trusted had apparently lied to him. How many others were involved? Who was the culprit or culprits? His plans for the future had been wrecked – his hopes for a family shattered. Gossip was then as it is now. Vicious. A future put on hold because of sexual immorality, expressly forbidden by the law of Moses. Being a Jew, the man realized the severity of the penalty: The law was explicit:

“If a young woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor’s wife; so you shall put away the evil from among you.”¹

The man pondered his situation and needed help to make a decision. Little did he know that help was on the way.

In the meantime, prior to the announced pregnancy, the young woman, a Jewess, had an uninvited visitor to appear in her home. Being engaged to be married under Jewish law implied certain restrictions that she had observed and kept faithfully. She was the daughter of Heli (Luke 3:23), of the tribe of Judah and of the lineage of David, hence in the royal line. Young Jewish virgins knew that the Prophet Isaiah had prophesied more than 700 years before, “Therefore the Lord Himself will

give you [Israel] a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”² And every young Jewish virgin hoped secretly in her heart that she would be the chosen one; hence, a reason to remain pure. The *uninvited visitor* was the angel Gabriel, sent by God to announce to the virgin, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women.” “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. 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. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”³

While the prospective groom was *pondering his situation*, “behold an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.’ Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.”⁴

Merry **Christmas** from

Jim & Dale Ash

²Isaiah 7:14, brackets inserted.

³Excerpted from Luke 1:28-33.

⁴Excerpted from Matthew 1:20-25

¹Deuteronomy 22:23, 24.