

The Birth of our Lord in the Flesh

Written by

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In accordance to the calculation of the Fathers of the Church Jesus Christ was born in the year 307 of Alexander, son of Philip, which was the year 43 of Augustus Caesar and in the 35th year of Herod the king, in the month of first Kanoun (December) 25 of it, on Wednesday at night before the cock crows. At the time of the birth of Jesus Palestine was under the jurisdiction of the Roman Empire. A year earlier, the Emperor Caesar Augustus of Rome had sent to Quirinius, the Ruling Governor of Syria, and ordered him to take a census of his region for taxing purposes. Thus, all men went to their own home town to register according to the law. Joseph too went forth from Galilee to Bethlehem the City of David in Judea to register his name. He took his betrothed wife Mary with him. At this time, Mary was almost at the time to give birth and was only 13 years old. Joseph, being very careful about her condition, placed her on the back of a donkey. They started their three-mile trip towards Bethlehem and Joseph noticed that she had laid her hand upon her abdomen, her face was wrinkled with discomfort and Joseph knew the time was coming. Mary requested Joseph quickly make an accommodation for her because the labor was setting in.

As they reached Bethlehem, Joseph comfortably placed Mary on the ground and immediately went to look for a mid-wife. He found a mid-wife whose name was Shalom and she guided them to a nearby stable where she helped Mary give birth to Jesus. When Joseph had returned to the cave he saw that the cave was bright with light and behold a Child wrapped in swaddling clothes was laid in the manger.

There were Shepherds who had been watching their flock at night, then suddenly the angel of God appeared to them, with the glory of the Lord shining about them, the shepherds were very much afraid. The Angel said to the shepherds not to fear for they have come to announce to them a joyful tidings that Christ the Lord was born to them in the City of David. They had been given a sign, the sign was, they will find a Baby wrapped in swaddling

clothes, laying in a manger. The Angelic Hosts joined in the great choir of The Heavenly being singing: “*Glory to God in the Highest and on Earth peace and a good home to mankind.*” (Luke 2:14) Saint Ephrem writes the angel said to the shepherds:

“Today there is born to you a life-Giver (Luke 2:11) (The angel) did not say, “There is born a man, who will be a Life-Giver, or who will be a Messiah,” but rather, *Today there is born to you a Life-Giver, who is;* not “who is to become,” but who is the Lord, the Messiah.”¹

As soon as the Angelic hosts disappeared into Heaven, the shepherds said to each other “*let us go, now, to Bethlehem to see what has come to pass, that which the Lord has made known to us . . . and they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph with The Babe laying in the manger.*” (Luke 2:15-16)

This was the month of Nissan and the Magians came from the East to worship the newly born King and offer Him gifts. Isho dad says:

“A calculation concerning what year of Alexander and at what time (of year) our Lord the Christ was born. In the year 307 of Alexander, son of Philip, which was the 43rd year of Augustus Caesar, in the 35th year of Herod the king of the Jews, in the month of the first Kanon (December), on the 25th of it, on a Wednesday, in the night before cockcrow, our Lord was born of the Virgin, she being 13 years of age; and she died at 51 years of age; and at that time Quirinus was sent a governor; and in the month of Nissan the Magians came. But Babhai the Persians said that in the day and the night that our Lord was born the Magians came; and not after two years, as those who have not investigated say; and this, he says, is quite evident from the scriptures, that when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, there came Magians; now they were three sons of kings, and nine from among the nobles of the lands; and the king of the Persians who sent the Magians was called Pirshabour; and these came by the guidance of the likeness of a star. “Lo, we saw his star in the east, because in the midst of the star was shown the likeness of Virgin embracing her son; and it is evident from many things that it was not real

¹ Saint Ephrem’s commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron, Carmel McCarthy. Published by Oxford University press on behalf of the University of Manchester, 1993, page 66, II.13.

star, nor an imagination, nor a fantasy, nor automation, but an angle who shone like a star from Persia to Bethlehem.”²

The letter Yodh of the Aramaic language, also stands for the number 10. Saint Ephrem in his Hymn of the Nativity connects the first letter (Yodh) of the Aramaic version of the name Jesus, ‘Isho’ to the tenth of April, the day of the incarnation of God the Word in the Virginal womb of the blessed Mary. In addition to that Number ten is considered a perfect number and number six the date of his birth on January, is considered a perfect number as well. Saint Ephrem says:

“Light was like a harbinger
To the Bright One to whom Mary gave birth,
For His conception was in the victory of the sun. Blessed be the Conqueror!
“Yodh” stands at the beginning of Your name.
It stands at the tenth in the month of April.
On the tenth You entered the womb.
Your conception was in a symbol of the perfect number.
The number ten is complete;
On the tenth of April You entered the womb.
The number six is also perfect;
On the sixth of January Your birth gave joy to the six directions.”³

Jesus Christ was born in Kanon (December) the month that earth does not produce fruits. It was on this month that the Virgin Mary gave birth to the hope and redeemer of the whole world. The Son whom Mary gave birth is the light of the world. He, Jesus, is the Lord of all, equally worshipped with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. Sons and daughters of the Church of the East in the following anthem pray:

² *The Commentaries of Isho dad of Merv, Bishop of Hadatha (c.850 A.D.) in Syriac and English*, V.1 , Pp. 14-16, ed. and tr. Margaret Dunlop Gibson, intro. James Rendel Harris (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1911.

³ Ephrem the Syrian hymns, translated and introduced by Kathleen E. McVey. Paulist press, New York. Mahwah .Hymn on the Nativity, Hymn 27, Pp.210-211.

“In the month of Kanon, in which the earth does not yield fruits, the LORD desired to show the fruit of the Virgin which was the cause of all good things and the good hope of all creatures. And HE is the True Light, Christ the LORD of all, worshiped with His Father and His Holy Spirit.”⁴

Jacob of Serugh associates the birth of Jesus (His descending) in the month of Kanun (December) to the descending of the degrees of cold weather. And he connects His ascension into heaven in the month of Huziran (June) to the lengthening of the day light and expulsion of darkness. Jacob of Serugh says:

“He (*Jesus*) descended in *Kanun*, as also the sun descends in degrees. He ascended in *Haziran* and by His light He choked darkness.”⁵

The time of the birth of Jesus namely the month and the season in which He (Jesus) was born reveal the circumstances of people at that specific period of time. Jesus was born in the month of January^[TJ1] when were too depressing because of their long length. He was born in winter when the whole world was miserable and, stopped generating new lives. It was at such time that Jesus Christ the gladdener and, the Savior of the world was born. Saint Ephrem says:

“In January when the nights are long,
Daytime without limit hone forth to us.
In winter when the whole creation is gloomy
The beauty that gladdened all of creation emerged.
In winter that made the earth barren,
Virginity learned to give birth.
In January that stilled the birth pangs of the earth,
The birth pangs of virginity came.”⁶

⁴ Khudra (prayer book) published in Mar Narsai press, Thrissur, Kerala 1960. the second Monday of the season of Advent, Volume. 1, P. 148.

⁵ Jacob of Serugh, Selct Festal Homilies, Translated from Syriac and introduced by Thomas Kollampampil, CMI, with a foreward by Sebastian P. Brock, Center for Indian and Inter-religious studies (CIIS), Rome, and Dharmaram Publications (DP), Bangalore 1997 P. 342.

⁶ Ephrem the Syrian hymns, translated and introduced by Kathleen E. McVey. Paulist press, New York. Mahwah .Hymn on the Nativity, Hymn 4, Pp.98-99.

We have said in the beginning that at the time of the birth of Jesus the King, Emperor Caesar Augustus of Rome had sent to Quirinius the Ruling Governor of Syria, and ordered him to take a census of his region for taxing purposes. The purpose of this census was to show that people are indebted to the Roman Emperor. In contrast, Jesus Christ was born to cancel our debt of breaking the commandment of God in paradise and to pay it in full by His death on the Cross. It is recorded in the book of Exodus (Ex.12: 3-6) that it was April 10 that Moses commands the people to take a lamb, put the blood on the doorframes as protection from the angel of death for the feast of Passover. Moses by doing this prefigures the coming down of God the Word on the 10th day of April and closed Himself with Humanity in the womb of the Virgin Mary. And He (Jesus) was born in the month when the light (The Sun of righteousness) begun to conquer darkness (Satan). Saint Ephrem the Syrian says:

“On the birth of the Son, the king was enrolling
The people in the census,
So that they would be indebted to him. To us the King came out
To cancel our debts, and He would be indebted to us,
The sun conquered and engraved a symbol
On the degrees that it ascended. Since it ascended
It is twelve days, and today is
The thirteenth; a perfect symbol

(January 6, the thirteenth day since December 25, the day of the Conquering Sun.)

Of the birth of the Son and of His Twelve.
Moses shut in the lamb in April
On the tenth day a symbol of the Son
Who came into the womb and closed Himself up
On the tenth day, He came out from the womb
In this month when the light conquers.
Darkness is defeated to signify
That Satan is defeated, and light conquers
To shout out that that the First - born is victorious.
The dark One is defeated with the darkness,

And our Light conquers with the sun.”⁷

Everything related to the birth of Jesus Christ took place according to the plan of God. From His birth in Bethlehem of Judaea, the house of bread, or His conception in April the month in which earth begins to bring forth life. As Saint Paul says; Jesus took upon Himself a form of a slave in order to liberate mankind from the slavery of Satan, sin and death. Thus, the Lord wisely chose two months to fulfil His earthly Ministry; April (Nisan) for His conception and January (Canun) for His birth. Saint Ephrem writes:

“In this blessed month in which manumission takes place,
The Lord came to slavery to call the slaves to freedom.
Blessed is He who brought manumission!
The Lord of the months chose two months for his action:
His conception took place in April (Nisan) and His birth in January (Conun).
In April He sanctified those conceived, and those He freed in January.”⁸

The birth of Jesus the King of Kings at the time Emperor Caesar Augustus was governing was not accidental. The meaning of the name of the Roman Emperor Radiance or happiness pre-figured the birth of Jesus the King who will bring Joy and happiness to the whole world. The enrollment of the names of people in books for the tax purpose also is a symbol of the enrollment of the names of the followers of Jesus the King in the book of life. Saint Ephrem says:

“In the year of that king, who is called
“Radiance,” (Caesar Augustus) our Lord shone forth
Among the Hebrews, and “Radiance” and “Dawn”
Came to rule: a king on earth
And the Son on high. Blessed be His power!
In the day of the king who enrolled people

⁷ Ephrem the Syrian hymns, translated and introduced by Kathleen E. McVey. Paulist press, New York. Mahwah .Hymn on the Nativity, Hymn 5, Pp.107-108.

⁸ Ephrem the Syrian hymns, translated and introduced by Kathleen E. McVey. Paulist press, New York. Mahwah .Hymn on the Nativity, Hymn 22, P. 180.

For the poll tax, our Savior descended
And enrolled people in the Book of life
He enrolled (them), and they enrolled Him. On high enrolled us.
On earth they enrolled Him, Glory to His Name!”⁹

Fathers of the Church in the following Anthem have compared the conception and giving birth of the Virgin Mary without the help of human seed to the Rod of Aaron. The rod of Aron sprouted and put forth buds without being planted in the Earth and without being irrigated. The rod of Aaron, by producing the fruit of wonder, revealed the power of the almighty God who is able of doing everything He wishes. In other words, there is nothing impossible with Him. After the same manner that same power of the almighty God came down from heaven and rested upon the Virgin Mary and made her worthy to conceive and give birth to the Savior of the world without the help of the human seed.

“Like the rod of Aaron put forth buds; Thus the virgin was conceived, O unfaithful Jew; because that which was not planted, and it was not irrigated, it sprouted forth. The virgin without a husband, and without seed was conceived by the command of God. That rod was showing forth the fruit of wonder; and the Power of the Most High came and rested upon the one filled with grace. And was made worthy to give birth to Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World. HE, unto whom we give worship, saying; ‘Great are You, O LORD, in the (Your) dispensation of Your Grace, Lord of all, Glory be to You.”¹⁰

The conception and birth of Jesus Christ from the Virgin Mary took place in accordance to the plan of God prophesied by the Prophets of the Old Testament where Micah prophesized about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem of Judea, and the name of King Herod was also mentioned to show that the

⁹ Ephrem the Syrian hymns, translated and introduced by Kathleen E. McVey. Paulist press, New York. Mahwah. Hymn on the Nativity, Hymn 18, P.159.

¹⁰ Khudra (prayer book) published in Mar Narsai press, Thrissur, Kerala 1960. the third Sunday of the season of Advent, V. 1, P. 155.

prophecy of Jacob which says that the scepter shall not depart from Judea has been fulfilled. Isho Dadd says:

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod; for he recalls the place and the time, in order to show that all things took their fulfilment according to the voices of the prophets. Bethlehem, on the one hand, according to what Mica had prophesied, and thou also Bethlehem of Judea, art not little, etc. He mentioned Herod, on the other hand, on account of the promise which the prophecy of Jacob delivered. The scepter, it said, shall not depart from Judea, etc.; destroyed the genealogy books of the Jews; so as to make it appear that he came of the good stock of the Jews; and the robe of the priesthood was put beneath his seal.”¹¹

The following anthem describes all the activities which took place on the day of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Shone to us from Mary the begetter of Christ, the hope of the whole world. The manger first carried Him, and now the Cherubim and Seraphim celebrate Him. And from the breast He nursed. Behold giving life to the whole world. The shepherds are rejoicing. The Magi offered presents. The angels unceasingly with the voice of thanksgiving say: ‘glory to God in the Highest, and upon earth peace, and a good hope to mankind.’”¹²

After the departure of the angels the shepherds who were watching their sheep at night came to Bethlehem in order to worship the Baby Jesus. These shepherds did not come with empty hands. They brought three gifts with them; one for Joseph, one for Mary and one for the Baby Jesus. Saint Ephrem the Syrian also believes, that by the Divine power of God, the Magai came to meet Baby Jesus in the same day the shepherds visited Him.

“Now Mar Ephraim says that the shepherds came with gifts of three kinds; flesh, and milk, and praise; flesh as for Joseph; milk, as for the mother; praise as for the Child; and he says also that the coming of the Magi was accomplished also in that

¹¹ *The Commentaries of Isho dad of Merv, Bishop of Hadatha (c.850 A.D.) in Syriac and English*, V.1 , P. 15, ed. and tr. Margaret Dunlop Gibson, intro. James Rendel Harris (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1911.

¹² Khudra (prayer book) published in Mar Narsai press, Thrissur, Kerala 1960. the Commemoration of Saint Mary Mother of Christ. V. 1, P. 610.

day by the Divine mandate working marvels. Now the Birth was revealed to the Shepherds; in His Resurrection to a woman, His gospel was entrusted to publicans and fishermen, and tent-makers.”¹³

Saint Jacob of Serugh talks about the two births of Jesus. In His Divinity He (Jesus) is born from God the Father before time, and in His Humanity He is born of Mary at the end of time. Both of Jesus’ births are mysterious and indescribable.

“Neither that (birth) from the Father nor that from Mary is explained because unique is your nativity, hidden as well as revealed and it is ineffable.”¹⁴

The birth of Jesus as man took a natural course. As every child stays for a period of nine months in the womb of his mother before its birth so did baby Jesus. Jacob of Serugh says:

“And when the edifice of His flesh was perfected spiritually
And the structure of His corporeality stood ready in abundance,
And when He had accomplished the full measure of nine months,
The begetter of Adam wished to come into birth in due order.”¹⁵

The Place of the Birth of Jesus:

Saint Ephrem likens, the needy girl, Virgin Mary whom the virgin daughters of great men envied to Bethlehem whom towns and cities were envied as well.

“Blessed are you, Bethlehem, whom fortified towns
And fortified cities envied.
Mary, like you, women envied,

¹³ *The Commentaries of Isho dad of Merv, Bishop of Hadatha (c.850 A.D.) in Syriac and English*, V.1 , P. 158, ed. and tr. Margaret Dunlop Gibson, intro. James Rendel Harris (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1911 .

¹⁴ Jacob of Serugh, *Selct Festal Homilies*, Translated from Syriac and introduced by Thomas Kollampampil, CMI, with a foreward by Sebastian P. Brock, Center for Indian and Inter-religious studies (CIIS), Rome, and Dharmaram Publications (DP), Bangalore 1997 P. 45.

¹⁵ Jacob of Serugh, *Selct Festal Homilies*, Translated from Syriac and introduced by Thomas Kollampampil, CMI, with a foreward by Sebastian P. Brock, Center for Indian and Inter-religious studies (CIIS), Rome, and Dharmaram Publications (DP), Bangalore 1997 P. 76.

And virgin daughters of powerful men.
Blessed is the girl He found worthy to indwell,
And also the town He found worthy to inhabit.
A needy girl and a small town
He chose to humble Himself.”¹⁶

Prophecies about the virgin birth:

The birth of Jesus Christ from the Virgin Mary made all the prophets rejoice. Because it was on this day that their prophecies were fulfilled. Some of the prophets who prophesied the birth of a Savior are: King David the ancestor of Jesus Christ in the flesh, Isaiah is another one who prophesied the birth of Emmanuel from a Virgin and Zachariah is considered another one. Jacob of Serugh says:

“On this day let the band of the prophets rejoice
Because, behold, their secrets are explained by your nativity,
On this day let David, your father, touch his chords
And with his harp let him sing about your nativity, because it has appeared
openly.
On this day let Isaiah too be aware in his tomb
Because behold, the Immanuel has come, as he prophesied.
On this day let the son of Amos come to praise
Because I have given birth to a babe, yet I am a virgin as he wrote about me.
On this day let Zachariah be awakened to rejoice with us
Because you are the man whose name is “Sunrise” in prophecy?”¹⁷

Zardusht who was previously called Baruch wrote about the birth of Jesus from a Virgin without conjugal intercourse. Baruch is the pupil of Jeremiah, was offended and went out to the heathen country, and there he learned twelve languages and wrote in them that vomit of Satan, that is to say, that book of theirs that is called the Avesta. Zardusht informed his

¹⁶ Ephrem the Syrian hymns, translated and introduced by Kathleen E. McVey. Paulist press, New York. Mahwah .Hymn on the Nativity, Hymn 25, Pp.302-303.

¹⁷ Jacob of Serugh, Selct Festal Homilies, Translated from Syriac and introduced by Thomas Kollampampil, CMI, with a foreward by Sebastian P. Brock, Center for Indian and Inter-religious studies (CIIS), Rome, and Dharmaram Publications (DP), Bangalore 1997 P. 87.

followers as soon as you see a special star on the sky be advised that the savior of the world is born. Go present Him offerings, three gifts, gold, myrrh, and frankincense; as He is the King of kings,” Isho Dadd say:

“For it is written there, that as Zardusht was sitting at a fountain of water, a place that had been established as a bathing place for the ancient kings, he opened his mouth and said to his disciples, “hear, O my beloved, and sons whom I have educated in my doctrine; for in the latter days a virgin, a daughter of Hebrews, shall without conjugal intercourse bring forth a son in whom somewhat of the Divine nature shall dwell, and He shall do wonderful miracles and signs, and at His birth a star shall be shown to you. Go, bring Him offerings, three gifts, gold, myrrh, and frankincense; as He is the King of kings,”¹⁸

God promised King David that one of his sons would set on his throne forever. This promise was fulfilled by the birth of Jesus Christ. It was Jesus, who as a faithful Shepherd, came down from heaven to save the world. Saint Ephrem, in his commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron says:¹⁹

“If Mary had been from another tribe, it would have been a lie [to have said], *from the house of David*. For the angel said, *The Lord will give him the throne of his father, David*. (Luke 1:32) He is the son of Mary, however, and not the son of Joseph. He did not appear in the body from any other lineage, except from David. For [the prophet] said, *There will come forth a shoot from the stock of Jesse, and a scion (Implant) will blossom from his root*. (Isaiah 11:1) Zachariah also testified [to this] when he said, *He has raised up for us a horn of Salvation in the house of David, his son*. (Luke 1:69) In like manner also the apostle said, *Our Lord Jesus Christ came from Mary, from the seed of the house of David*. (a citation from the apocryphal third letter of Saint Paul to Corinthians 3 Cor.5) written about 190-206 AD.) He wrote to Timothy as well, remember Jesus Christ, he who rose from the dead, he who came from the seed of the

¹⁸ *The Commentaries of Isho dad of Merv, Bishop of Hadatha (c.850 A.D.) in Syriac and English*, V.1 , P. 19, ed. and tr. Margaret Dunlop Gibson, intro. James Rendel Harris (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1911 .

¹⁹ Saint Ephrem’s commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron, Carmel McCarthy. Published by Oxford University press on behalf of the University of Manchester, 1993. Pp. 54-55.1.26.

house of David. (Timothy 2:8) In the Letter of the Romans he said, it was promised beforehand in in the Holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who appeared in the flesh from the seed of the house of David.”

Conclusion:

Jesus Christ was born in the year 307 of Alexander, son of Philip, which was the year 43 of Augustus Caesar and in the 35th year of Herod the king, in the month of first Kanoun (December) 25 of it. At the time of the birth of Jesus Palestine was under the authority of the Roman Empire. The Emperor Caesar Augustus of Rome had sent to Quirinius, the Ruling Governor of Syria, and ordered him to take a census of his region for taxing purposes. Accordingly, all men travelled to their own home town to register according to the decree. Joseph also went forth from Galilee to Bethlehem to register his name. He took his betrothed wife Mary with him. The time for the Virgin Mary has arrived to give birth to her Son baby Jesus. Joseph placed Mary on the back of a donkey. At that time Mary and Joseph started their trip towards Bethlehem. In Bethlehem Joseph noticed that the time has come for Mary to give birth. She requested Joseph as soon as possible to make an accommodation for her because the labor was setting in. Joseph went looking for a mid-wife. He found a mid-wife whose name was Shalom and she helped Mary give birth to Jesus. When Joseph had returned to the cave he saw a Child wrapped in swaddling clothes was laid in the manger.

There were Shepherds who had been watching their flock at night, then suddenly the angel of God appeared to them, with the glory of the Lord shining about them, The Angel said to the shepherds not to fear for they have come to announce to them a joyful tiding that Christ the Lord was born to them in the City of David. They had been given a sign, the sign was, they will find a Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, laying in a manger. The Angelic Hosts joined in the great choir of The Heavenly being singing: *“Glory to God in the Highest and on Earth peace and a good home to mankind.”* (Luke 2:14)