

Week #:	241	Series:	The Gospels	Title:	Mysteries of the Messiah (Episodes 3, 4, & 5) Episode 3: The Mystery of Jesus' Virgin Birth (13:39) Episode 4: The Mystery of the Manger and the Shepherds (12:22) Episode 5: The Mystery of the Swaddling Cloths and the Salt (12:10)
Songs:					

The Virgin Birth:

Video: Mysteries of the Messiah (Season 1 Episode 3) (13:39)

Rabbi Jason Sobel – *“The Mystery of Jesus’ Virgin Birth”*

Summary: Names and numbers. Both of these feature prominently in this episode of Mysteries of the Messiah. Mary is one of the most well-known characters in the entire Bible, yet did you know that wasn’t even her real name? Rabbi Jason teaches us how this detail opens up a profound connection to the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt and God’s redemptive history among His people. And the numerical value of the letters in her name points us forward to all that her son, Yeshua, would accomplish.

There’s So Much in a Name!

Let’s get right to the proverbial 800-pound gorilla in the room: her name wasn’t Mary? As hard as it may be to believe, Yeshua’s mother’s name was actually “Miriam.” Start practicing: “Jesus, Miriam, and Joseph.” Hundreds of years ago, the translators changed so many of the biblical characters’ names that we’re prone to think that they went by the familiar names we know. This fact is more than mere Bible trivia though—it opens up a world of truth. The most well-known Miriam in the Bible was Moses’s older sister. No detail in Scripture is coincidental. Can you think of any parallels between Moses and Yeshua? In what ways are both Miriams’ roles similar? Is it possible that the Miriam-Moses story foreshadows the Miriam- Yeshua story? The connections are both confirming and revealing if we’re willing to journey deeper.

An Angel Appeared

Matthew 1:20 (TLV) tells us that “an angel of Adonai appeared” to Joseph. Again, this is not an accident. The angel’s appearance prevented Joseph from divorcing Miriam (Mary). To appreciate the seriousness of the situation, Jason teaches us about the nature of Jewish marriage, specifically, that it entails two components: betrothal and consummation. Joseph was “betrothed” to Miriam, which is like “engagement plus.”

Think about what it would have meant for Yeshua to be born, not of a virgin, but a divorcee. How might that reality affect the Messiah’s birth? The apparent reason that Joseph was planning to divorce Miriam was that he had not participated in her conception. The radical idea that Miriam had conceived “from the Ruach ha-Kodesh” (Holy Spirit) is still challenging for many to believe. Yet the Bible provides several compelling clues—in our English versions and the original Hebrew—going back to Genesis 3.

Let’s Look at the Numbers:

Hebrew and Greek, the two main original languages of our Bible, are both “alpha-numeric.” Each letter in their respective alphabets has a numerical value attached to it. There are often meaningful connections between words that share the same numerical value (once its letters are totaled). Now imagine expanding this to include a map! That’s right—there is a connection between Mariam’s name and the city of Yeshua’s birth. And as Jason often says: “But there’s more!” The letters and numbers also point us to the greater purpose of Yeshua’s Incarnation, of “God with us.”

O Come, O Come

One of the questions we should always ask is: “what does this mean for my life?” In a day and time when we seem more confused and fearful than ever, these truths are invaluable! Think about it—who doesn’t want a key that will unlock peace and confidence in these moments of profound uncertainty?

Jason compares Miriam's response to God's promises with the accounts of Sarah's and Zechariah's responses. God told all three that they would miraculously conceive children, but one of them responded faithfully. No matter how challenging our situations may be, and outrageous God's promises may sound, we need to echo Miriam's song: "my spirit greatly rejoices in God, my Savior" (Luke 1:47/TLV).

Video: Mysteries of the Messiah (Season 1 Episode 4) (12:22)

Rabbi Jason Sobel – *"The Mystery of the Manger and the Shepherds"*

Description: When you imagine Jesus in a manger, what do you see? Suppose you base your picture on popular or famous artwork, in that case, you probably envision Him laying on a fluffy pile of hay, in a wooden box, and surrounded by all sorts of animals in a wooden barn. In this episode, Rabbi Jason unveils the oldest, undisputed truths of the Messiah's birth—and they turn most of our images upside-down! Discover the authentic Nativity story and its rich meaning for your life today.

Summary: The Nativity has been called "the greatest story ever told." The movies and artwork, and holiday decorations that fill our lives have given us images of what the Lord's birth was like, but are those images accurate? Was the Motel 6 in Bethlehem overbooked, requiring the kind night manager to let Mary and Joseph use the red wooden barn out in the back? Were the shepherds "in the fields" a ragtag bunch of scruffy, ignorant outsiders? Over the centuries, these details have been filled-in for us, and chances are, you've never questioned their accuracy. It's time for us to dive into the mysteries of this blessed night and not only uncover the truth but embrace its transformational power for our lives.

Mysteries and Misconceptions

When you tour the Holy Land, you quickly discover that there is one natural resource in short supply: trees. In contrast, there are rocks everywhere! This leads us to one of the most common misconceptions of the Nativity: that Yeshua was born in a wooden barn and laid in a wooden box called a "manger." The oldest (and undisputed) tradition is that Yeshua was born in a cave, not a wooden barn. The oldest church building in the world is the Church of the Nativity, located in Bethlehem. In AD 326, Emperor Constantine commissioned the original basilica, and the current edifice was erected in the 6th century. They built it over a grotto—a cave—that was and is believed to be the location of the Lord's birth.

Bethlehem was the home of David, the great shepherd of Israel. Shepherds would have prevalent in the Bethlehem area, as it is located only six miles from Jerusalem. But why did the angelic host appear to shepherds, telling them that the Messiah was born near them and that they would find Him "lying in a manger" (Luke 2:12 TLV)? Shepherds and farmers used mangers to feed sheep, and in Bethlehem, caves hewn into the rocky landscape (not barns) housed the sheep. As we'll discover, those caves didn't hold ordinary lambs.

Lowly Shepherds?

Aside from the misconceptions we often have about the setting of Yeshua's birth, we also typically have misconceptions about the characters: the shepherds. Were you ever told that the shepherds were ignorant men, maybe even thieves? Yet some of Israel's most significant leaders —Abraham, Moses, David— were shepherds. Rather than uneducated and poor outsiders, the men featured in the Nativity story were "levitical" shepherds (i.e., connected to the Levite priests). Remember: the Temple in Jerusalem was the site of Israel's animal sacrifices. Priests offered thousands of lambs there each year. And Bethlehem was only six, short miles away. These shepherds were responsible to care for the lambs that would be offered in the Temple from their birth, specifically for celebration of the Passover.

This is why the sign given by the angels would have made sense to them: they would find the Savior, the "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29 TLV) in the very place that birthed sacrificial lambs. The lambs that these shepherds had been rearing were prophetic types and symbols, pointing to the

true Passover Lamb who would take away our sin and the death that it brings into our lives. This connection is powerful! The “baby in the manger” is a mystery and a message: the reign of sin has ended.

Let’s Look at the Numbers

As we’ve mentioned, because Hebrew and Greek are both “alpha-numeric,” there are often meaningful connections between words that share the same numerical value (once its letters are totaled). The numerical value of the Hebrew word for “lamb” (ha seh) is 310. Now consider that the value of the phrase “he will atone” also equals 310. Finally, the letters in the Hebrew phrase “from evil” add up to 310. In sum, “the lamb” who “will atone” for our sin frees us “from evil.” The sacrificing of lambs was central to the observance of Passover and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement): both occurring on the tenth days of their respective months.

This is Good News!

Just as the Passover lamb commemorates Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt, Yeshua’s birth in a cave reserved for Passover lambs (and announced to Levitical shepherds) identifies Him as the true Passover Lamb of God who delivers us from slavery to sin. You don’t have to stay stuck in bondage, trapped in your “personal Egypt.” The mystery of the manger declares that you can walk in liberty!

Video: Mysteries of the Messiah (Season 1 Episode 5) (12:10)

Rabbi Jason Sobel – “*The Mystery of the Swaddling Cloths and the Salt*”

Description: In this episode, Rabbi Jason builds from his teaching in episode 4, which explored the details surrounding where Yeshua was born (not a barn) and who came to visit Him (not ignorant rabble). One of the signs the angels said to look for was a baby wrapped in “swaddling cloths.” Could this be more than a baby outfit and point to Yeshua’s prophetic destiny?

Summary: Contrary to the adage, God is in the details! As we explore the details surrounding the Messiah’s birth in Bethlehem, we begin to get a clearer picture of God Himself. Our detective work isn’t an end in itself, but an invitation to behold the glory of the Lord. In this episode, Rabbi Jason unpacks another detail that is right in front of us: the swaddling cloths. While it is true that swaddling would’ve been a common practice in Yeshua’s day, in our story, it’s a sign from heaven to these special shepherds. Rabbi Jason takes us even further into the details surrounding birthing practices in the Ancient Near East, revealing the impact of the Lord’s birth on our daily lives.

Swaddling Cloths: Not a Fashion Choice

Suppose there are new and transformational insights surrounding the manger and the shepherds. In that case, it only makes sense that fresh truth awaits us as we examine the idea of the swaddling cloths. It’s important to remember at the outset that Rabbi Jason is discussing matters that are not certain, as much as they are sensible. He’s not arguing that the birth of the Messiah had to be this way, but that it makes sense if it was this way. Ultimately, these insights should inspire wonder in our hearts and worship on our lips. (spoiler alert: details from the previous episode are revealed) If the shepherds in Luke 2 were educated “Levitical” shepherds... And if rather than a barn, Joseph and Mary (Miriam) stayed in a one of the caves used to keep and birth lambs for Temple sacrifices... It makes sense for the swaddling cloths to be a sign that worked in concert with those details. We know that swaddling was a common practice in Yeshua’s day, but newborns weren’t the only ones swaddled. The shepherds’ caves were not kiddie lamb-proofed. The jagged edges on the cave walls were not a good match for the clumsy lambs. Broken bones and scars would disqualify the lamb from being a sacrifice at the Temple, hence, swaddling.

What would have gone through the shepherds’ minds as they entered one of their caves, and rather than one of their sacrificial lambs, they saw a baby – swaddled in the same way?

Not Just Any Old Cloth

What if, beyond Levitical shepherds seeing a baby swaddled like one the Temple lambs in a shepherds' cave, there was more profound meaning in the cloths themselves? After all, Yeshua was not just the Lamb of God—He was the Prophet greater-than-Moses, the King of kings, and the true High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. Since the angelic announcement specified the swaddling cloths, it's worth considering what those cloths could have been.

Priests wore tunics as an integral part of their vestments. When those tunics wore out over their time of service, discarding them became a challenge, as they had been in God's Presence as part of the Temple worship. Consequently, those tunics were re-purposed as the wicks of the menorah, whose light was never to go out.

Intriguingly, Miriam (aka "Mary") visited her cousin Elizabeth early on in her pregnancy. Upon her greeting, John the Baptist leaped in his mother's womb. John, another baby whose birth was announced by an angel, was Zechariah's son—a priest! Is it possible that Miriam left Elizabeth's home with a precious gift that she would re-purpose in the shepherds' cave several months later?

Pass the Salt

There was another first-century birthing practice (not mentioned in the Bible): salting. In essence, parents would rub the newborn with salt to prevent infections. This act would've been deeply symbolic of purity, truth, and honesty. In Yeshua's case, it's also symbolic of the thousands of sacrifices the Israelites had offered over hundreds of years, each one of them with salt (see Lev 2:13).

Salt was also crucial to covenants. As David's kingly line seemed to crumble, Abijah (David's great-grandson) asked: "Don't you know that Adonai, God of Israel, has given kingship over Israel to David forever—to him and his sons by a covenant of salt?" (2 Chron 13:5) Those Levitical shepherds would have seen the Lamb of God, swaddled in "menorah wicks" as the Light of the world, rubbed down with salt as the Son of David, Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

This is More Good News!

Yeshua came to make a covenant with us, to befriend us. We live in the security of knowing that nothing can separate us from His love. The talk of "covenant" is not mere technicality—it's life-giving and a source of confident hope. God is for us!