

The Profane about Jesus' Birth.

Christmas has developed into a family celebration with a focus on love and gifts. The real meaning of the Incarnation of God has largely disappeared in our country, despite the approximately 20% of Germans still attending the Christmas service (according to <https://de.statista.com>). Of course, the birth of the Redeemer is preached and sung about in the churches. This spiritual side alone is important. The profane, i.e. the exterior, which is about the great event, is insignificant, but that is exactly what this article is about. If you are looking for transparency and truth - and that is what I like to research - you can't get past the worldly side. I even think that if one understands the profane, i.e. the exterior and the things on the margins better, one can recognize the spiritual truth more correctly, gain more depth and feel the sacred more clearly. It is therefore worth taking a look at the profane.

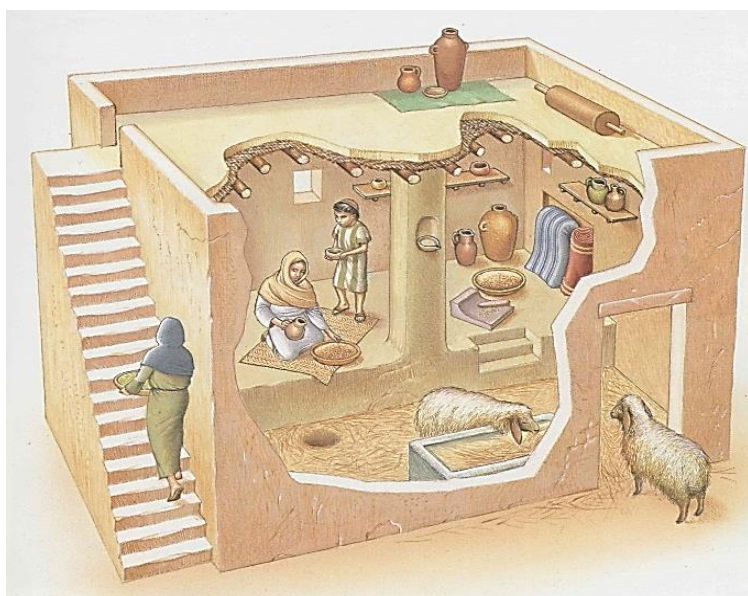
This essay emphasizes the truths of the Bible by pulling away the cover of the romanticizing tradition.

We necessarily paint. Unfortunately, the biblical reports are mostly very brief, because they can only report the most important things from the abundance of material. However, we would like to know more about it and therefore decorate the stories in our world of thought. This is helpful as long as they are insignificant extensions and the core message of the Bible text remains intact. The Christmas story is an extreme example of this. It was particularly widely decorated and strongly condensed in time. This necessarily happened to us with the ideas of our occidental understanding.

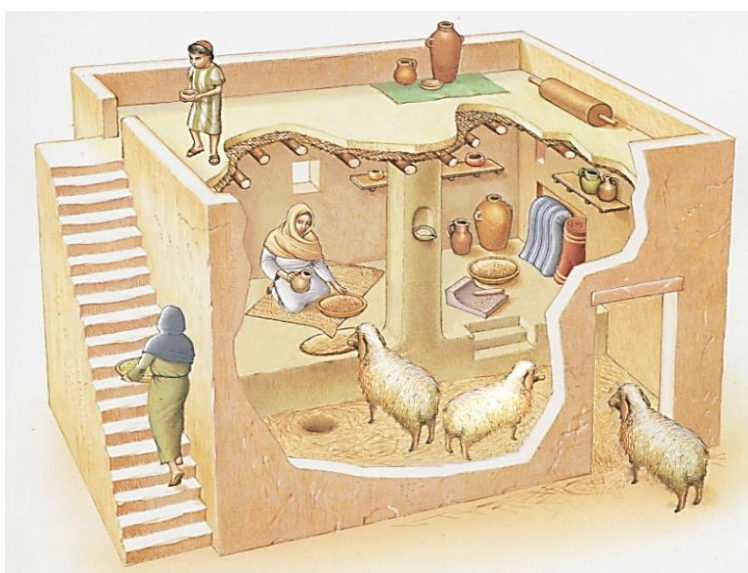
The cultures distinguish very much and this results in a significant problem of understanding, because the points of view are different and therefore also the understanding. On the one hand 2000 years have passed in which the world has changed a lot, on the other hand we live in the Christian and Greek formed occident, while the biblical reports are oriental and Jewish.

We, here and now, think rather systematically, logically, literally, enlightened and live in the welfare state. At that time and there, however, people talked more about stories, using numerical symbols, in pictures, in an ancient state of knowledge, and they lived socially embedded in clans. It is therefore quite normal that many images of biblical scenes do not really present themselves correctly in our heads. Some things I take up in the following, whereby I cannot avoid colouring unfortunately also and over everything a question mark remains.

By the standards of the time, the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was a very long and dangerous one (150 km, 5 days). There was no security for unaccompanied passengers. Robbers could easily attack them coming out of the desert. That's why they moved in groups. When you embark on a long journey, you practically connect things with each other. So it is very obvious that one combined the course to the census with the visit of the Passover festival and with staying with relatives. If one now travelled in groups and all chose the same combination, there was of course much going on in Bethlehem, for both Nazareth and



Picture 1: Typical main living area of a single or multi-room house at the turn of the century with a trough (crib) for the feed



Picture 2: Typical main living area of a single or multi-room house at the turn of the day in Bethlehem with a deep hollow (crib) for the food

Bethlehem were the cities of the great tribe of David, the Davidites.

"There was no room in the hostel" is a statement that is very understandable because of the crowds, but incorrect. If you look into the matter, you will come across a persistent translation error. You must read: "There was no place in the Guest room" Maria gave birth to her child in the main room, where also the feeding place was, and bedded it wrapped in diapers in a surely softly padded crib. See picture.

Kataluma is in the Greek report and not *pandocheion* as you would call a hostel. *Kataluma* is a place of peace, usually a guest room. In Luke 2:7 "guest room" should be written instead of "hostel". The same word (*kataluma*) is used for the place of the last Passover meal of Jesus.

Pregnant women generally enjoy a high protection status and this is more pronounced in the Orient than here. Since one did not stay overnight in hotels, but with relatives and because one lived in an oriental and thus very family-friendly culture, it is unthinkable that one would have denied a high pregnant woman a bed.

To give birth to a child in the stable, isn't that inhumane? Here again the cultures clash against each other. For us: yes. But not for the culture of the time. It wasn't a stable, but the main room, which had a corner for animals. In Jewish faith, the birth and menstruation of women was and is ritually impure. If Maria had born the child in the guest room, the room would have been ritualistically polluted. In addition to the external cleaning of the room after a birth, a time-consuming ceremonial purification in the religious sense would also have been necessary.

It is possible that during this high season priests were also among the foreign relatives who were accommodated in the guest room. Maybe they didn't want to bother them cultically, because if they had touched something impure even by mistake and you never know, they wouldn't have been allowed to do their service in the temple anymore, which they were usually only allowed to do once a year. That would have been bad for her. Consider also the story of the Good Samaritan, where the same background plays an important role (Lk 10:25-37).

Jewish rite: The family followed the Jewish laws, which the Bible testifies in Luke 2: "And when eight days were passed, and he was to be circumcised,

they gave him the name Jesus ... And when the days of their purification were ended according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord. Genesis 13:2; 13:15): "Every male who first breaks through the womb shall be sanctified to the Lord", and to offer the sacrifice, as it is said in the law of the Lord: "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons" (Exodus 12:6-8).

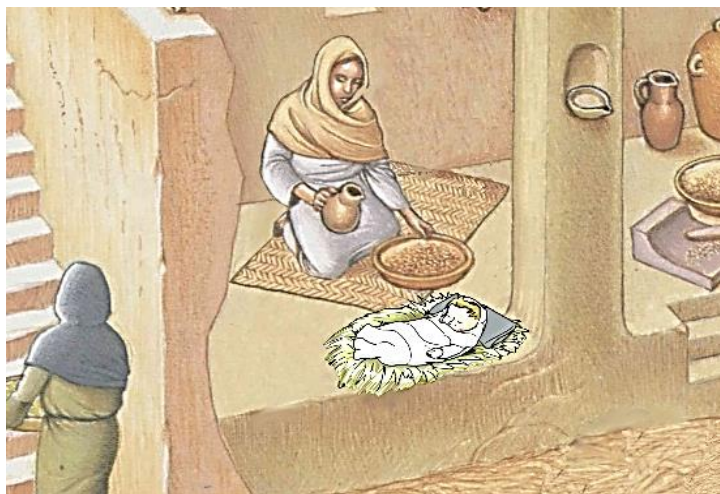
Our culture thinks of a crib made of wood. In Israel, where wood was scarce, this material was very expensive. But there were enough stones. So the crib was more of a stone trough than a wooden frame. Probably the crib was even only a deep hollow in a raised floor area and formed in this way a feeding place

for the animals. See pictures.

What animals were in the stable when Jesus was born? Probably none. The Gospels do not even say that Jesus was born in a stable, there is only talk of a manger. There is also nothing about a present ox or donkey told. In the Bible, however, there is much to read about sheep in the Bethlehem region. This is also obvious, because it fits to the given mountain country and it fits economically, because the sacrificial service in the temple had a high need for sheep, which the breeders from Bethlehem could serve comfortably due to the proximity.

The sheep lived with the family. At least that was the case at night in winter, because it made it possible to warm each other up. There was no central heating, and wood for firing had to be saved because it was expensive.

At beginning of march (1. Nisan), the shepherds gathered the sheep of the village and took them back to the pasture after the cold season. The Bible reports accordingly that the shepherds were in the field with the sheep. Because Jesus was placed in a feeding place, one can conclude from this that the animals were no longer in the house, because the sheep would not have given the Jesus child



Picture 3: Child in a trough-shaped crib

rest in the manger. Every animal eyes the feeding bowl. So Jesus was not born in winter either.

Bethlehem and the high nobility: The Bible very often refers to Jesus as the son of David, that is, as a member of the royal dynasty. This one was impoverished, but still something very special. In our culture one would say high nobility and equate this with people from families like Windsor, Habsburg or Hohenzollern (Prussia). Precisely because Jesus belonged to this royal dynasty, he seemed to be very dangerous to Herod and therefore ordered the **murder of children**. Matth. 2,16 says: "...Herod ... became very angry and sent out and had all the boys in Bethlehem and in the whole region, which were two years old and under, killed," *All boys*, that would have been something bad even in Herod's time, so the word *all* could only refer to the sons of the high nobility, for only they were dangerous to him. In view of the still sparsely populated area at that time, this possibly affected ten to twenty boys. If it had been, as often said, 2000, Josephus or other historians would have mentioned that. Herod suffered from being a king, who did not belong to the promising and noble family of the Davidites and that is why he feared constantly a rebellion by these. Bethlehem was their ancestral seat.

The same political jealousy also burdened the Jewish ruling dynasty of the Maccabees. They recruited 100 B.C. exiled Jews to settle in Israel. The Davidites among the late returnees naturally wanted to keep them away from Jerusalem and Bethlehem in order to politically cold them and therefore settled in distant Nazareth. (Nazareth = sprout-village) possibly because descendants of David's root lived there.)

Poor or rich? Since Mary sacrificed only two doves instead of one sheep, the young family was obviously not rich (Luke 2:24 and Genesis 3:12, 8). However,

Résumé: I find the profane things about Jesus' birth interesting, but not essential. Important is that God's Son came into the world to redeem us, to bring forgiveness and salvation, and to trigger a revolution in thought and action: Love instead of hate, forgiveness instead of strife, peace instead of war. Our occidental, democratic thinking was and is promoted by Jesus' impulses, the eternal salvation is his gift of grace. Despite my knowledge of the profane, I still set up the traditional Christmas crib with ox and donkey, the wise men from the East and the Jesus child in the wooden crib. Every year I enjoy the worshipping and also the incorrect but wonderful Christmas song "Es ist kein Raum für dich" [There is no room for you]. Profane and external correctness or not, my heart needs the established tradition for worship and it feels comfortable in it and generates a deep gratitude to my Redeemer.

she probably had real estate in Bethlehem, as she had to go there for the census (tax collection).

Joseph was a master builder and not a carpenter, as usually is said. In the culture at that time there were no wooden buildings, like we know them and therefore are no carpenters necessary, because, as already said, one saved on expensive wood and built the houses from stones. Because Joseph was a trained craftsman and therefore already something better, one can assume that the family was neither poor nor rich and therefore belonged to the middle class. -- According to tradition, Maria's father Joachim (Eli) was a pious and wealthy sheep trader.

The wise men from the Orient (Holy Three Kings) probably came from Ecbatana and were star researchers inspired by Zarathustra and Daniel of Judah.



Picture 4: Possible way of the wise men from the East

They sought the crown prince Judas in Jerusalem to show him their reverence. They met the baby Jesus when he was probably eight months old.

The family apparently stayed with their relatives in Bethlehem for almost a year, from where they fled from Herod to Egypt and found asylum there.

Further information can be found in the sources quoted below, which are well worth reading. In my essay on the Internet "The Wise Men from the East and the Star of Bethlehem" I go into detail about the star researchers and other facts about the birth of Jesus. There is also a lot of evidence there. Who would like to investigate even in the Internet finds the way best with the keyword Kataluma.

Criticism: Concerning the birthplace I give in this essay the opinion of Kenneth E. Bailey, who lived locally. The expert author Hesemann takes a somewhat different view, he wrote to me: Dear Mr. Diedrichs, thank you very much for your text. On the whole it is correct, with one exception. Jesus was not born in the basement of a house, but in a stable cave. The flocks of sheep were too big to live in the living room. Moreover, there was no need at all; the limestone in Bethlehem is so soft that one could easily dig caves into the rock, which were perfectly suitable as stables. Since such a stable, which certainly belonged to the Davidids, stood empty, so Mary could bring her child into the world there undisturbed without coming into conflict with the Jewish purity regulations. Therefore it is certain that Jesus was not born in winter, when the sheep were still in the stables, but between March and November! Dr. h.c. Michael Hesemann sends his warmest greetings. www.michaelhesemann.info

Sources for this essay:

-) Jesus was no European, Kenneth E. Bailey, SCM Brockhaus Verlag
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-) The Wise Men from the East and the Star of Bethlehem from the Author,
-) Download: <http://diedrichs.de/stern-von-bethlehem> or at academia.edu
-) Picture (1): Student Bible Guide, Angus Hudson LTD & CSV Stuttgart
Tim Dowley (Autor), Richard Scott (Illustrator);
-) Picture (2&3): Variation of (1) done by Helmut W. Diedrichs
-) Author: H. W. Diedrichs, Darmstadt, Germany (helmut@diedrichs.de)