

VOLUME 27 NO. 141 JULY/AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1993

***Exalting CHRIST among the Deaf***

## Personally from Billy



Greetings!

Although we are behind schedule, we are bringing this issue out at a time when much of the world is celebrating the holiday known as "Christmas". We know you will enjoy the cartoon strip "*Virgin Birth*", and we hope you will understand the wonderful gift God gave us when He sent His own Son to the earth as a baby that later grew to be our Lord and Savior.

However we do need to know the truth about "Christmas"-- is it really a holy day commanded of us in the Bible? What should be our attitude toward this world-wide holiday? Read the article beginning on page 16. We need to put the Christmas holidays into their proper perspective.

And as we close this column till next issue, we wish you **Happy Holidays**.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Billy Leavell".

Billy Leavell,  
Editor

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# THE VIRGIN BIRTH

FROM LUKE 1:26-30,  
2:1-20  
MATTHEW 1:18-25

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, THERE IS THIS PROPHECY, MADE BETWEEN 700 AND 600 B.C....

"IMMANUEL" MEANS  
"GOD WITH US."  
(MATTHEW 1:23)

*Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel.*  
*Isaiah 7:14*

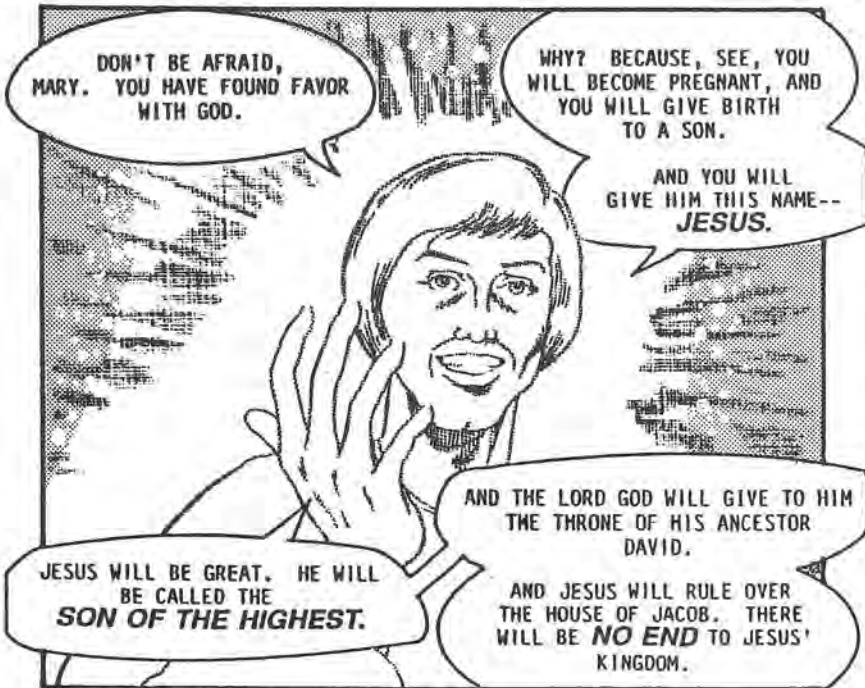
THE SCENE WAS NAZARETH, 100 MILES NORTH OF JERUSALEM...



HERE MARY LIVED, A VIRGIN, ENGAGED TO BE MARRIED TO JOSEPH...



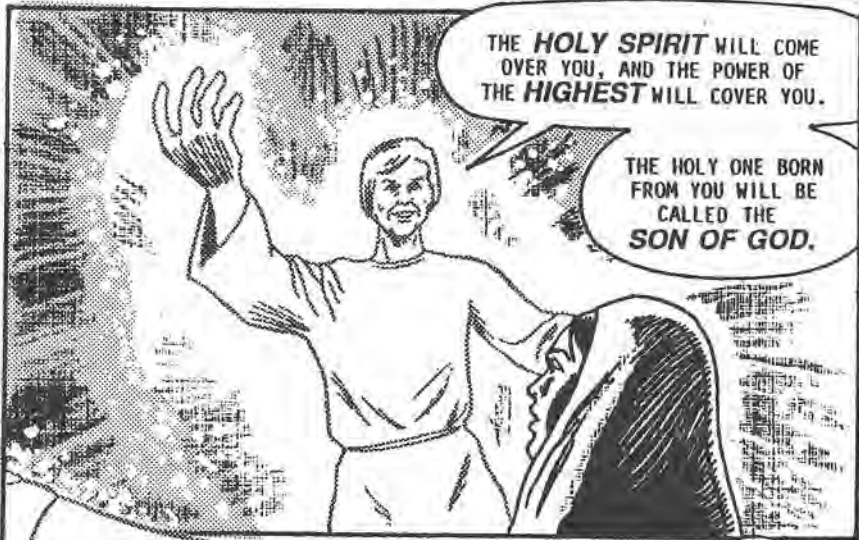
THIS DAY MARY HAD A SURPRISE VISITOR-- THE ANGEL GABRIEL WHO STOOD BEFORE THE LORD HIMSELF!





H-HOW CAN THIS HAPPEN?  
I HAVE NEVER KNOWN A MAN!

"TO KNOW" IS A HEBREW EUPHEMISM MEANING SEXUAL INTERCOURSE.

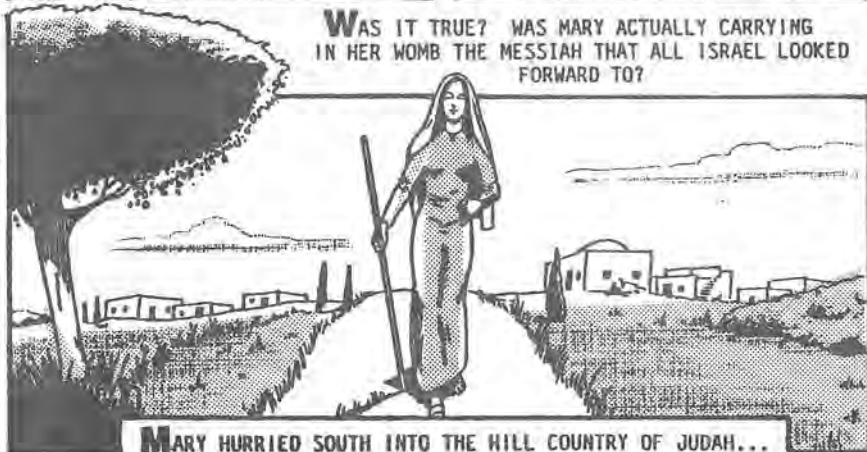
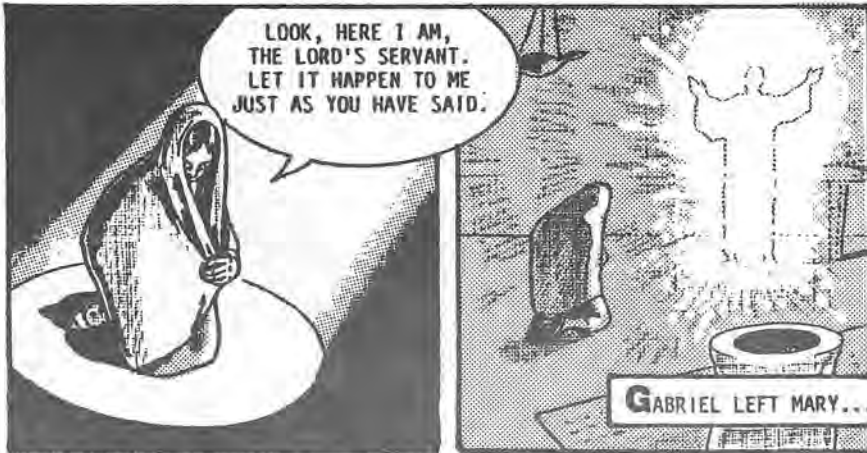


THE *HOLY SPIRIT* WILL COME  
OVER YOU, AND THE POWER OF  
THE *HIGHEST* WILL COVER YOU.

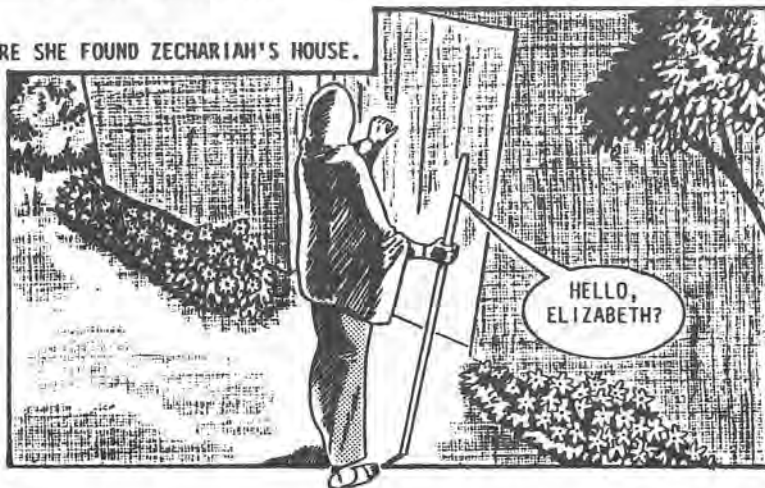
THE HOLY ONE BORN  
FROM YOU WILL BE  
CALLED THE  
*SON OF GOD*.



SEE, YOUR RELATIVE ELIZABETH.  
ALSO HAS BECOME PREGNANT WITH  
A SON IN HER OLD AGE. IT IS  
NOW HER SIXTH MONTH. BEFORE  
THAT, PEOPLE SAID SHE  
WASN'T ABLE TO HAVE CHILDREN!



WHERE SHE FOUND ZECHARIAH'S HOUSE.

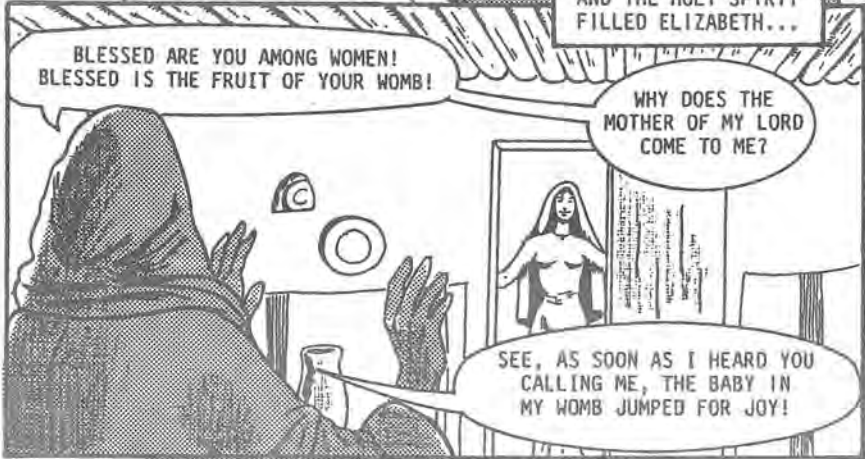


INSIDE, WHEN ELIZABETH, ZECHARIAH'S WIFE, HEARD MARY...



THE BABY JUMPED!

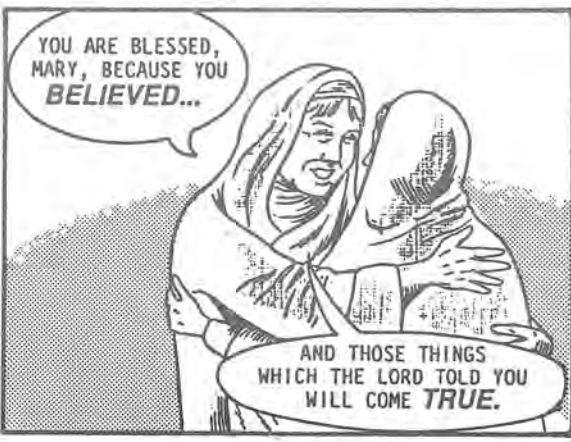
AND THE HOLY SPIRIT FILLED ELIZABETH...



BLESSED ARE YOU AMONG WOMEN!  
BLESSED IS THE FRUIT OF YOUR WOMB!

WHY DOES THE MOTHER OF MY LORD COME TO ME?

SEE, AS SOON AS I HEARD YOU CALLING ME, THE BABY IN MY WOMB JUMPED FOR JOY!



YOU ARE BLESSED, MARY, BECAUSE YOU BELIEVED...

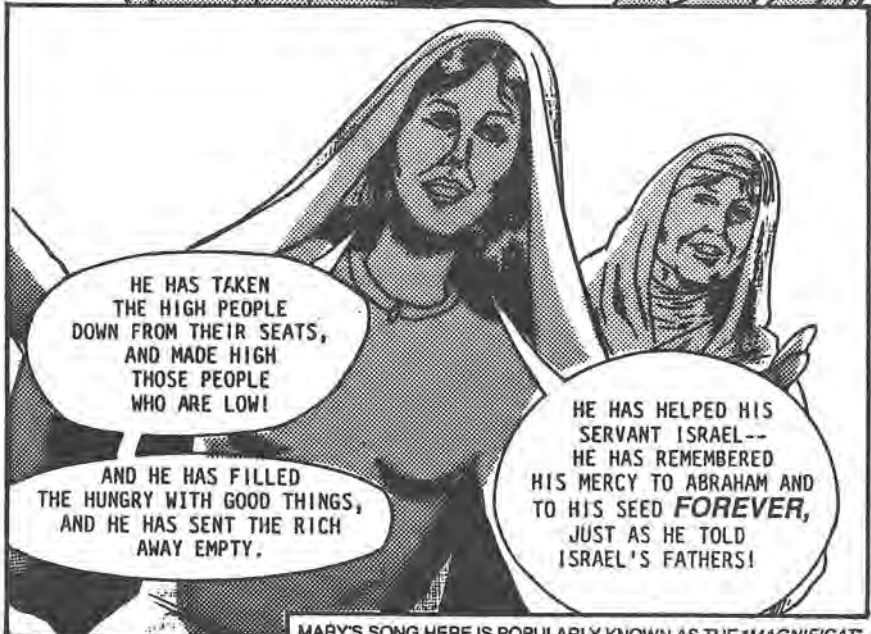
AND THOSE THINGS WHICH THE LORD TOLD YOU WILL COME **TRUE**.

MARY WAS FULL OF JOY!



MY SOUL MAGNIFIES THE LORD!

MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOR!



MARY'S SONG HERE IS POPULARLY KNOWN AS THE "MAGNIFICAT".



**MARY** KNEW IT WAS REAL-- SHE WAS REALLY EXPECTING THE **MESSIAH** IN HER WOMB!



SHE STAYED THREE MONTHS WITH HER RELATIVE ELIZABETH.

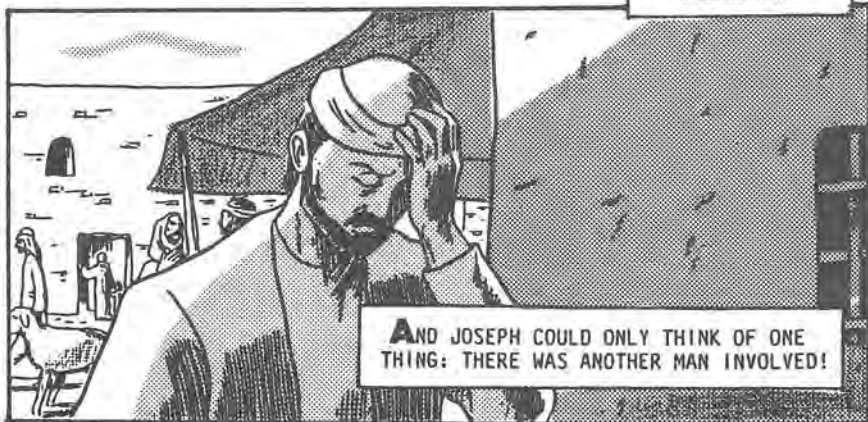


**J**UST BEFORE ELIZABETH GAVE BIRTH TO JOHN THE BAPTIST, MARY WENT BACK HOME...

**W**HEN MARY RETURNED TO NAZARETH, HER HUSBAND-TO-BE, JOSEPH, WAS UPSET WHEN HE SAW HER--



IT WAS CLEAR SHE WAS VERY MUCH PREGNANT!



**A**ND JOSEPH COULD ONLY THINK OF ONE THING: THERE WAS ANOTHER MAN INVOLVED!

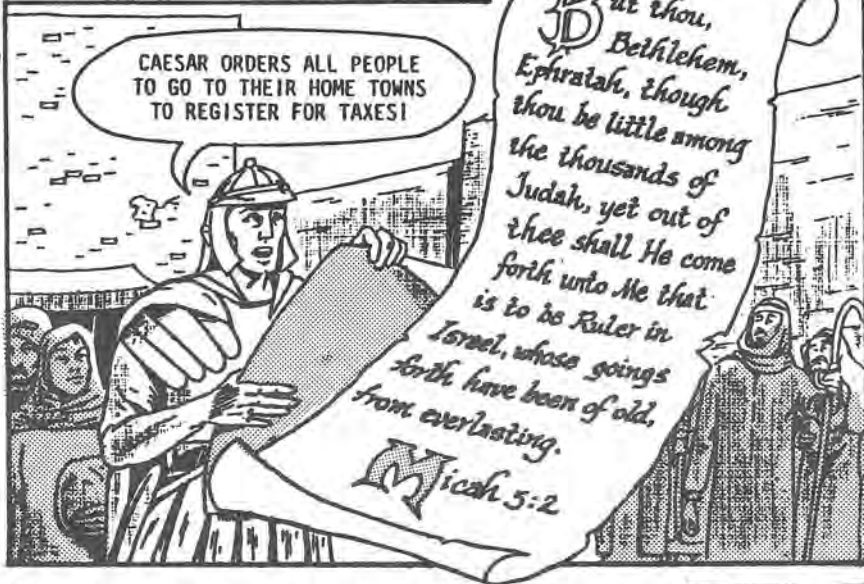
BY MOSES' LAW, AN UNFAITHFUL WIFE OR WIFE-TO-BE WAS TO BE **STONED**. BUT JOSEPH WAS A GOOD MAN. AND HE DIDN'T WANT TO MAKE PUBLIC WHAT HE THOUGHT WAS MARY'S SIN.



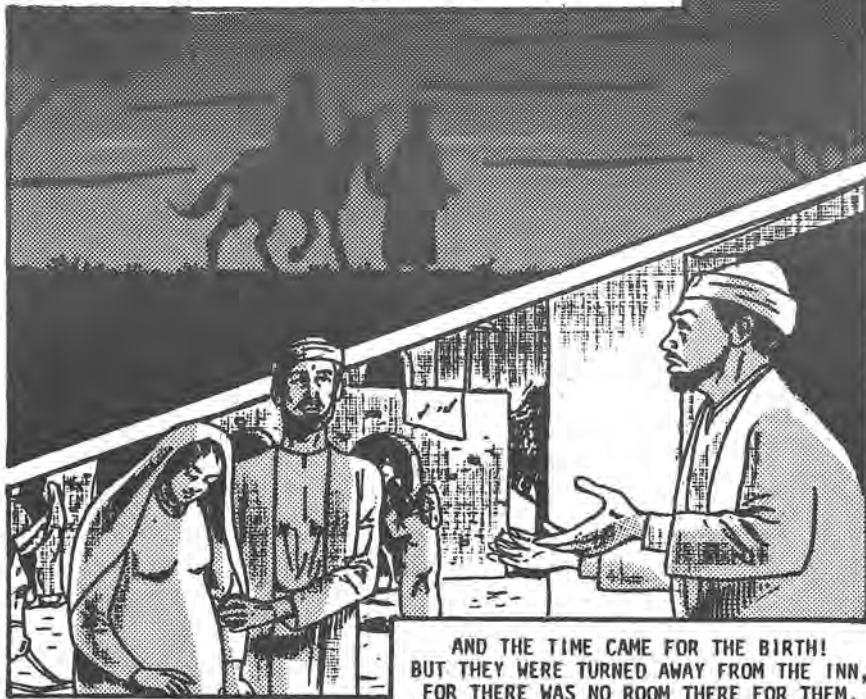
BUT AN ANGEL OF THE LORD CAME TO JOSEPH IN A DREAM...



**J**OSEPH TOOK MARY AS HIS WIFE, BUT WHEN HE DID SO, ANOTHER PROPHECY CAME TRUE...



**J**OSEPH AND MARY WENT ON THE LONG JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM...



**U**NDER THE STARS, A TINY  
BABY'S WAIL WAS SOON HEARD...



IT WAS A MIRACULOUS BIRTH,  
FOR THE NEWBORN BABY BOY HAD  
**NO FLESHLY FATHER.**

**A**ND OUT IN THE FIELD, SHEPHERDS WERE  
KEEPING THEIR FLOCK...

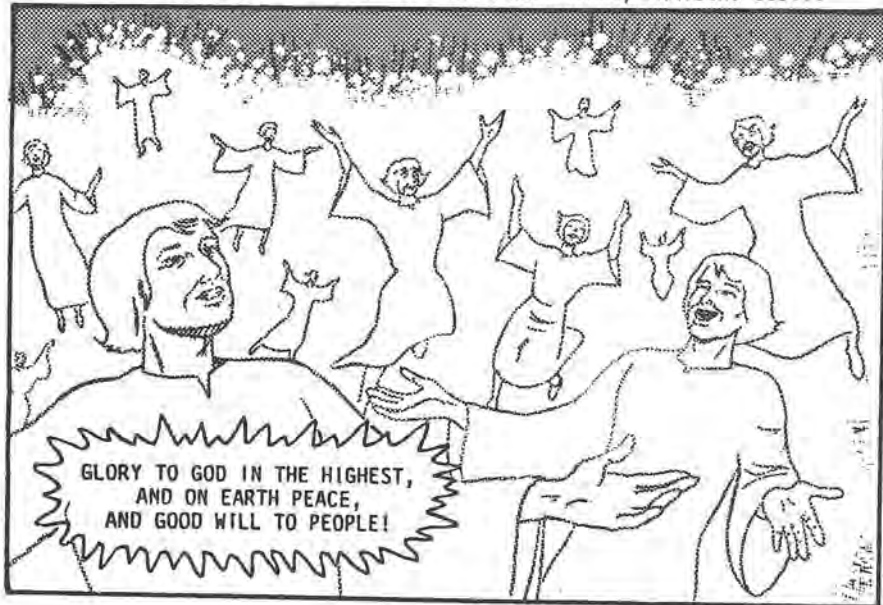


**W**HEN AN ANGEL SUDDENLY  
APPEARED TO THEM!





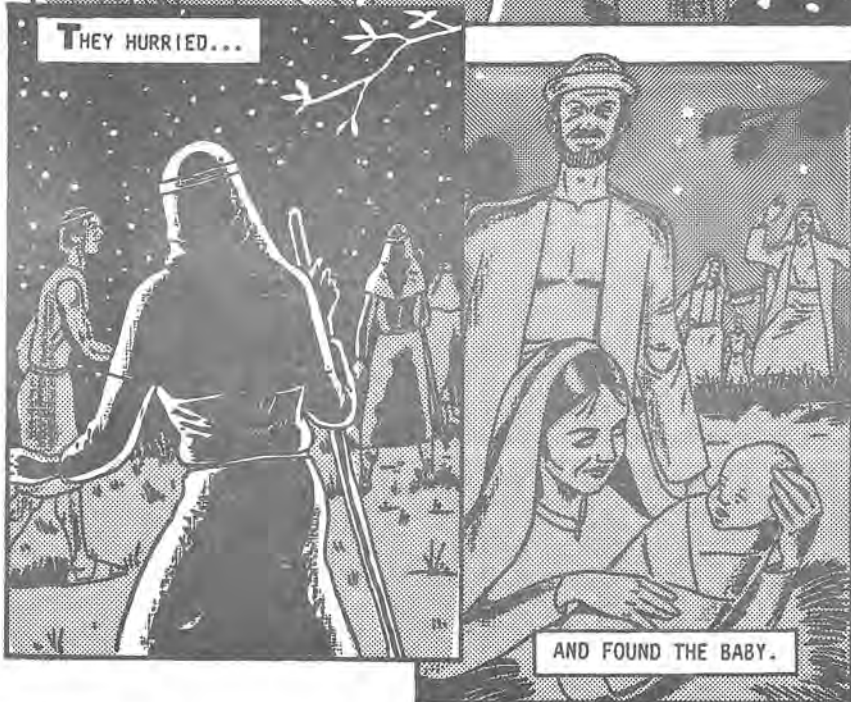
**S**UDDENLY MANY ANGELS APPEARED WITH THE FIRST ANGEL, PRAISING GOD...



WHEN THE ANGELS WERE GONE...



THEY HURRIED...

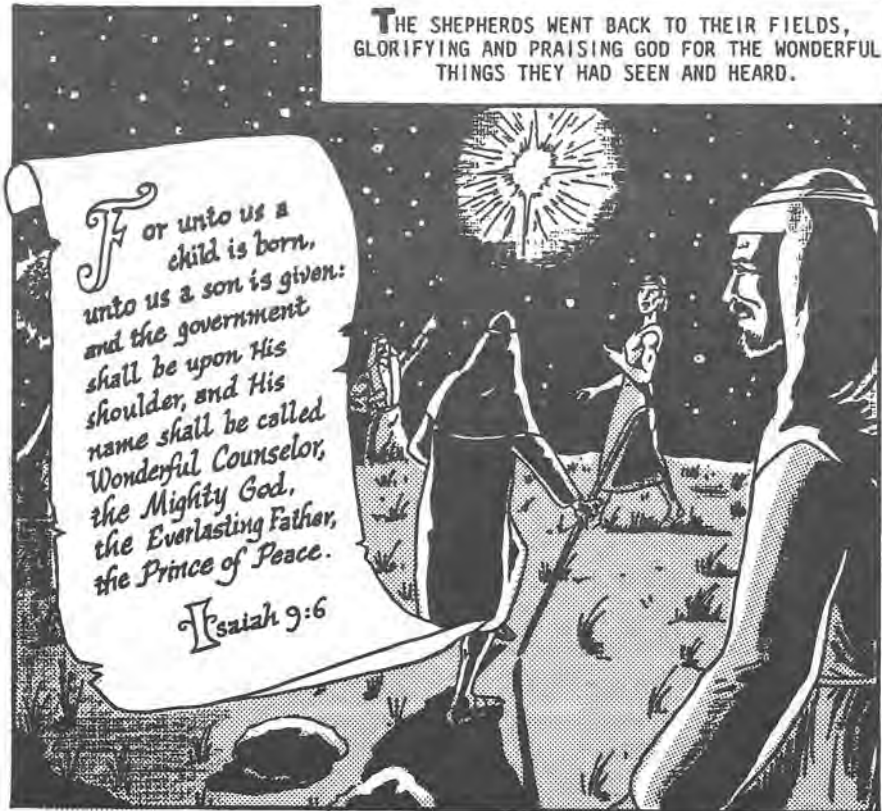


**T**HE SHEPHERDS EXCITEDLY SPOKE ABOUT THE ANGELS' VISIT.



**M**ARY JUST FILED EVERYTHING IN HER MEMORY AND THOUGHT ABOUT THESE THINGS.

**T**HE SHEPHERDS WENT BACK TO THEIR FIELDS, GLORIFYING AND PRAISING GOD FOR THE WONDERFUL THINGS THEY HAD SEEN AND HEARD.



*F*or unto us a  
child is born,  
unto us a son is given:  
and the government  
shall be upon His  
shoulder, and His  
name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor,  
the Mighty God,  
the Everlasting Father,  
the Prince of Peace.

*Isaiah 9:6*

# THE TRUTH ABOUT CHRISTMAS

by Billy Leavell



**D**uring this season many people's thoughts are turned to sparkling ornaments, gay-colored packages, brilliant lights, the exchange of gifts, the singing of carols, and of course to that great scene in starlit Bethlehem.

These people greatly enjoy celebrating the holiday known as "Christmas".

But the truth is that "Christmas" is not found in the Bible. You may search your Bible from cover to cover, but you will not find a single word mentioning Christmas.

It is true that the wonderful story of Jesus' birth is found in Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38, 2:1-21. It is a beautiful story which every devoted Christian will love to read over and over again.

But not a single word in the Bible sets aside a special day to be celebrated as "Christ's birthday".

Then where did Christmas come from if the Bible does not mention it?

A look at some encyclopedias will tell you that the word "*Christmas*" comes from the early English phrase **Christes Masse**. This phrase in modern English means "*Christ's Mass*". The "Mass" referred to is the Roman Catholic version of the Lord's Supper. Why "Christ's Mass"? Because every year, on December 24, at midnight, the Catholics celebrate a special Holy Mass in honor of Christ's birth.



A study of some history will be very helpful for us to understand how Christmas began and developed. In the beginning, the church did not celebrate Christmas at all. This was because the first Christians were Jews, who did not celebrate birthdays. The only regular celebration these first Christians kept was when they met every first day of the week (Sunday) to observe the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7).

Through the years, the gospel spread to many people in many different nations. These people were taught about Christ and came to believe in Him. Among these people were pagans who formerly worshiped false gods. These pagans also celebrated birthdays. It is not known exactly when these pagans, now become Christians, decided to celebrate Christ's birthday, but more than 200 years after Christ's time, they were doing this.

No one knows when Jesus was born. The Bible does not give a date. It is doubtful Jesus was born on December 25. Why? Because Luke 2:8 says the shepherds were keeping their sheep out in the field the night Jesus was born. Authorities, who know Bible life and customs, say the shepherds near Bethlehem kept their sheep out in the fields mostly in the springtime. In fact some early Christians began celebrating Jesus' birthday on May 1. Albert Barnes, an outstanding Bible scholar, tells us, "It is probable... that our Saviour was born before the 25th of December, or before what we call Christmas. At that time it is cold, and especially in the high and mountainous regions about Bethlehem" (**Barnes' Notes**, commentary on Luke 2:8).

It was in A.D. 354 when Liberius commanded that Christmas be kept on December 25. Liberius was the Bishop of Rome. But the church in the east countries refused to use that date for Christmas. Instead they used January 6. Even today January 6 is used in eastern countries like Russia, the Ukraine, Georgia, etc. These eastern Christians thought their western brothers in Rome were sinning terribly. Why? Because December 25 was the date for a pagan festival. This pagan festival honored a false god, the sun god Mithra. The eastern Christians blamed the Roman Christians for worshiping idols as well as the sun.

When we learn about this ancient pagan festival honoring Mithra, we can understand why the Christians in the east were upset with their brothers in the west. Every December, in the northern lands, the days became very short. The people who lived in these northern lands did not know about the earth orbiting the sun. They did not understand that the length of the days would change with the seasons. But they noticed that the days in December seemed to become shorter. These people were

afraid that soon the days would be gone. Then there would be just one long night forever. So these people built great bonfires, because they thought that these bonfires would give strength to the sun god Mithra and revive it. The days became longer, because the earth was still moving along on its orbit around the sun. This made the people think that their bonfires made the sun stronger. They were very happy and celebrated. Of course, after summer came and went, the days would become shorter again. Then the people were afraid for the sun again, and had their festival again. And so they did this every year.

Missionaries taught these pagans that there is just one God, and that all other gods, including Mithra, are false. These people turned to Jesus Christ and believed in Him. But they did not give up their wintertime festivals. They changed their Mithra festival to a festival that honored Jesus Christ's birth. After all, Jesus is the Light of the world (John 8:12).

Since these pagans used many lights in their ancient festival, these lights came over into our Christmas celebrations. Hence the use of lights at Christmas time.

But the merry-making and exchange of gifts now associated with Christmas did not start until the Middle Ages in England. Feudal lords ruled over the people who lived on their land. At Christmas time, these feudal lords allowed these people to have riotous parties. They had feasts, singing, games, and masquerades. The walls were decorated with hollies. This led to our custom of Christmas wreaths on our doors and windows.

In the 17th century, the Puritans did not like this kind of riotous living. So when they gained power in England in 1644, they passed laws against these parties. But after the Puritans lost power, Christmas found its way back into England. The people began the custom of family reunions, decorating with lights, gift exchanges, carols and parties. The English influence can be easily seen in many Christmas greeting cards and paintings of snow-covered villages and people caroling. Charles Dickens made an English-type Christmas famous with his story, *A Christmas Carol*, written in 1843.

Now that you know the facts about Christmas, and that it is not found in the Bible, we ask this question: Is it wrong for believers in Christ to celebrate Christmas?

Since the Bible does not give any date for Christ's birth, and does not give us any command about "Christmas", we know we cannot celebrate it as an official "holy day".

But at the same time it is up to individuals if they want to take advantage of the culture and time to think about Jesus' wonderful virgin birth and arrival into this world, and even to celebrate it. Paul says, "One person might believe that one day is more important than another. And another person might believe that every day is the same. Each person should be sure about his own beliefs in his own mind. The person that thinks one day is more important than other days is doing that for the Lord" (Romans 14:5-6, EVD).

Many believers do not celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday, but do enjoy its traditional joys, such as family get-togethers, gift exchanges, time off from school and work, etc.

Other believers also enjoy remembering the arrival of our Lord's birth and rejoice over it (see Luke 2:10). Truly, we should always be thankful to the Father for sending us His Son (1 John 4:9)!

### Note:

In last issue's *Questions and Answers*, we were saying a denomination means a division of the Lord's church. We received criticism for this statement. It was pointed out to us there is only one body (church) of Christ (Ephesians 4:4, Colossians 1:18), and that it cannot be divided (1 Corinthians 1:13).

We regret we did not make ourselves any clearer, and the fault is ours. While all the above is true, however, man takes a different viewpoint from God's. Men *do* divide and argue (1 Corinthians 1:10-11). They *do* divide into different groups (1 Corinthians 1:12). *This* is what we were talking about, men trying to divide the Lord's church into smaller groups. We were referring to *men's viewpoint*, not to God's.

There is still only *one* church that our Lord began and is building, even if men do try to divide it into different groups (denominations). It would be wonderful if we all united together on Christ and His Word (John 17:20-23; see also our comic strip treatment of this subject in the April/May/June 1986 issue of **Light for the Deaf**).

We will have more questions to answer in our next issue.

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Reminder: Please inform us of your change of address. Many of you have done this, and for this we thank you tremendously!

## THE GREAT SWEEP OF GOD'S LOVE

"HE THAT **DESCENDED** IS THE SAME ALSO THAT **ASCENDED**  
UP FAR ABOVE ALL HEAVENS, THAT HE MIGHT FILL ALL THINGS."  
—EPH. 4:10



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