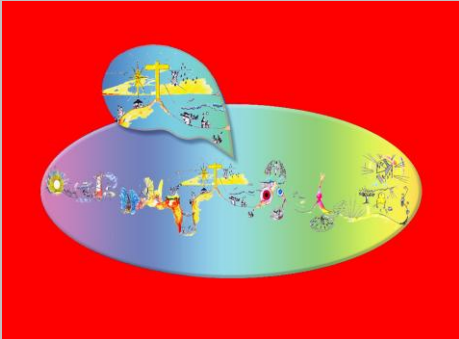


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Eternal Fellowship News Bulletin

We believe in one GOD, in three persons; FATHER, SON and HOLY SPIRIT. We regard the Bible (both Hebrew Bible and New Testament) as the only infallible authoritative WORD OF GOD.

HULDAH MINISTRY aims to return to the Word Of God, founded on Hebrew background and to interpret it from Hebraic perspective, acknowledging that Jesus is a Jew and the Jewish-ness of His teaching as a continuation from the Hebrew Bible. The Ministry also aims to put His teaching into practice, to have a closer relationship with the Lord, Jesus Christ, and to regularly have a Christian fellowship so that this-worldly kingdom of God will materialise in the midst of the followers of Jesus here and now, as well as earnestly seeking Christ's Return to establish the otherworldly Kingdom of God on earth.

All activities are free of charge and no obligation whatever. Just enjoy our fellowship!

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HULDAH MINISTRY

LETTER TO THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST

【TRUE STORY OF THE BIRTH OF CHRIST】

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.....So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.....

And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them. "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.".....

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

LUKE 2:1-20(Line added).

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: " 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.' "

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. MATTHEW 2:1-12(Lines added).

The season of Christmas has come upon us again. The manger scene of baby Jesus surrounded by three wise men dressed in kingly robes with three gifts and by humble shepherds has traditionally been received as a famous Christmas pageant all over the world. While numerous creatively assembled pageants have been presented by adding imaginative elements to the true story of the Saviour's birth, there remain many unresolved issues around the identity of the men called '*Magi from the east*', the bright star which they followed, the time of their visit of a toddler Jesus, and the place where they visited. The two accounts of Christ' birth from different viewpoints by Luke and Matthew amazingly reveal the truth of exactly what happened in Bethlehem around two thousand years ago.

It was the same year when Caesar Augustus issued a decree of census, that Christ was born. All Jews were required to register at the place of their tribal origin. As Joseph was from the genealogy of the house of David, so he was to register at Bethlehem where King David was born, at least three days' journey away from his current residence, Nazareth. He was accompanied by Mary who was pledged to be married to him and was very soon due to bear a child. Mary was also of the house of David and possibly was also required to enroll, and they would have registered their marriage at the same time. The baby was delivered in a stable and wrapped in cloth, which is thought to be the same material that shepherds used in the process of delivering and inspecting lambs in the fields. This event is regarded to have taken place at "*Rosh HaShanah*" on Tishri 1, commonly known as the "Jewish New Year", or as the Jews call it "The Birthday of the World". Judaism has several different new years: Nissan 1 is the new year of their religious calendar, Elul 1 is the new year for the tithing of animals, Tishri 1 is the new year of their civil calendar, and Shevat 15 is the new year for trees. In the Torah, "*Rosh HaShanah*" is referred to as "*Yom Teruah* (The Day of the Sounding of the *shofar*)" and on that day everyone was required to hear the *shofar*, i.e., in Hebrew to *Shema* (hear) the awakening blast of *shofar*. Given that the theme of "*Rosh HaShanah*" is 'to awake', it is significant that on that day an announcement of the Saviour's birth was given to the shepherds in the fields by an angel. The flocks reserved for temple sacrifice were bred and kept in the fields near Bethlehem throughout the year. Providentially on that blessed night, accompanied by heavenly choirs singing '*Glory to God in the highest*', Christ, the "Great Shepherd, and at the same time, the Lamb of God" was born. This good news was loudly and clearly announced, like a trumpet sound, to the shepherds in the field that was originally owned by David. They unexpectedly shared first-hand, the wonderful experience of the celebration of Jesus' birth with Mary and Joseph. Interestingly, Bethlehem, which means "House of Bread", had been an insignificant city and had failed to even be mentioned among the cities of Judah in Joshua's and Nehemiah's days but God used this city to bring forth "the Bread of Life", the Messiah into this world. On the eighth day after His birth, Jesus was circumcised and on the fortieth day after His birth, Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem

with Him to offer *‘two young pigeons’* as a sin offering, required by the Law of the Lord. It was in the temple that a righteous and devout man Simeon and an eighty-four year old woman Anna, moved by the Holy Spirit, prophesied over baby Jesus. They declared Jesus to be Messiah and Saviour of the world. Then sometime later Jesus and His parents went back to Joseph’s home town, Nazareth, where Jesus grew up. Luke’s Gospel mentions nothing about the wise men or the star which guided them to Bethlehem. But there is another Gospel by Matthew, which draws the story of Jesus’ birth from a different angle.

The Magi were established as the state religion of Persia, and there existed a hereditary, powerful priesthood by Darius the Great who lived East of Mesopotamia. The term **‘Magi (wise men)’** which is translated from the Greek “μάγοι (magoi)” is said to be derived from a Persian proper noun of their caste and has nothing to do with magic or such kinds. According to research over the Magi, in spite of the corrupt religious environment such as Baal and Astarte which was widespread in those days, the Magi absolutely forbade the veneration of any sort of image and kept a monotheistic stand. From their earliest beginnings in the seventh century BCE, they were known to have burned an eternal flame on their altar. Among their basic spiritual concepts; earth, air, fire and water, fire was supreme and they envisioned God as a fiery reality, and heavenly stars and planets were an extension of this concept. Oneiromancy (divination based on dreams), not astrology, was their field of special gifting. Their traditional robes were of pure white so as to emanate an air of spiritual authority and they also wore conical hats of pure white. They carried bundles of thin rods for divination and forecasted by reading the patterns of dropped rods. During the reign of Cyrus the Great, they began to adopt Zoroaster faith, honouring a god of light and offered blood sacrifice to their god on the flaming altars. Since the days of the prophet Daniel in the Babylonian exile, the Magi came to be closely intertwined with Jewish worship and prophecy. At the end of the exile, Daniel lived among them as a respected spiritual authority and he is said to have founded a secret cabal within the Magi as custodians of a private prophecy concerning the birth of the Messiah, the bright star and so on. Sometime later Daniel died, probably in his late eighties and he was buried in the territory of ancient Persia.

Even after the Jews’ repatriation, the Magi continually inherited Daniel’s work and spiritual influence. By the beginning of the fourth century BCE, the worship of the Magi came to have much in common with that of the Jews. Each had its monotheistic concept of one creator who was author of all good against evil, and concept of clean and unclean. Their hereditary priesthood acted as the essential mediator between God and man through the system of a blood sacrifice. The Magi and the Jews used a means of divination, in the form of “small bundle of divining rods” and “the Urim and Thummim of the Levite” respectively. At the beginning of third century BCE, Magian Zoroastrianism became the state religion of Persia and had a great influence in their dual priestly and governmental office. Under Seleucid domination, after the Greek Empire founded by Alexander was divided into four empires, the Magi and the Jews regained their independence. It was at this time that the Magi composed the upper house of the council of the Megistanes (“magistrates”), which exercised the absolute right of designating kings. If they declared their decision as God’s will, it was powerfully binding. Actually, it was with such politically and religiously influential, enormous power that the Magi travelled up to Jerusalem at the close of the first century BCE, when Jesus was born. Whenever they travelled, with pure white garments, they mounted on thoroughbred horses but never camels. They would pompously travel with hundreds of their delegates; an armed cavalry, soldiers, cooks, servants and so on. Matthew illustrates their majestic appearance in Jerusalem as **‘When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him’**. It must have been a terror for Herod, because the magi possessed the power of making and breaking monarchies. Their declaration of a new Jewish king; **‘the one who has been born king of the Jews’** must have been a real threat of political loss of status, power and wealth for Herod who was an Idumean and simply a Roman appointee.

Over a year must have passed since the birth of Christ as Matthew describes in his Gospel: *‘After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked...’*, when the Magi appeared in Jerusalem. At the time when Jesus was born, Herod may already have been close to his final illness and it was probably in December. Concerning the star in Bethlehem, the false prophet Balaam had prophesied: *‘I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel’*. This prophecy was initially fulfilled in King David, but ultimately it was fulfilled in the incarnation of the Messiah, and further, it will be completely fulfilled in His Second Coming when He appears as the *‘bright Morning Star’* and King of the world as symbolised by *‘scepter’*. After being informed about where Christ was to be born through prophecies, the Magi travelled southwards to Bethlehem. German mathematician and astronomer in the sixteenth century, Kepler suggested that the star could have been associated with the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces in seven BCE. Also, there is a piece of information that in the years between third and second BCE, a series of astronomical phenomena such as the conjunction of Jupiter, Venus, Saturn and the king star “Regulus” (a phenomenon of stars, planets and constellations being aligned) took place. Maybe, the bright star in the southern sky was a supernatural indicator but not a normal astronomical phenomenon that led the Magi to the place where a toddler Jesus was with his parents.

He was no longer in the stable, and by then, they had moved into a house somewhere in Bethlehem. For some reason but not mentioned in the Bible, Mary and Joseph seem to have travelled back to Bethlehem after going up to the Jerusalem temple for her purification and for the dedication of their firstborn son Jesus, instead of returning home in Nazareth. The term used as *‘the child’* is the Greek “παιδίου (paidion)” and means “toddler”. This implies the little boy was around fifteen months old when the Magi visited their house. Acknowledging that the boy was the very one prophesied to be king of the Jews, the delegates *‘bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh’*. Their first gift was *‘gold’* and it represented monarchy, prophetically promising a glorious Davidic kingdom. The Magi, themselves as king-makers, affirmed the toddler Jesus as the promised King of kings, the Messiah. Their second gift was *‘incense’*, i.e., frankincense which symbolised priesthood. When Levitical priests burned fragrant incense on the altar of incense, its rising smoke signified acceptable prayer by God. This gift represented Christ’ priestly office and it prophetically pointed to His resurrected and glorified state. Since His resurrection, Christ has been in His intercessory office as our great High Priest sitting down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. Their third gift was *‘myrrh’* and it was also associated with the Aaronic priesthood. While it was the principle ingredient for priestly consecration, it was used for burial spice of the dead in Jewish society. Prophetically it implied the preparation for death. Significantly Jesus referred to “perfume” as an essential element of preparation for burial when a woman poured an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume on Jesus’ head: *‘When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial’ (Matt.26:12)*. The word ‘perfume’ translated from the Greek “μύρον (muron)” stemmed from “murra”, meaning ‘myrrh oil’ and it could be a blend of myrrh. Thus, the Magi, acknowledging His deity and His priesthood, prophetically presented a burial ointment for His death. The Messiah was to be appointed by God to be crucified not for Himself but for us, to redeem all God’s children out of the bondage of sin, for our redemption! The very day when the Magi presented their gifts to a toddler Jesus might have been the traditional day we celebrate as Christmas.

**We hope all the blessings and peace of this special Season
Will light up your life with Faith, Hope and Love.
Wherever and Whoever we are,
JESUS CHRIST is God’s Gift for us!**

