

## THE ACCOUNTS OF JESUS' NATIVITY

**O**f the four Gospels, only Matthew and Luke give an account of the Savior's miraculous conception and birth. Written from two different perspectives and containing different details, these two narratives complement each other and together paint an important picture of the nativity. Significantly, the most fundamental points upon which they agree (that Jesus' mother was named Mary, that she lived at one time in Nazareth, that he would be born near Jerusalem, and that his conception was a divine miracle) are the details that are individually supported in three different contexts in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 11:13–20; Mosiah 3:5–8; and Alma 7:10).

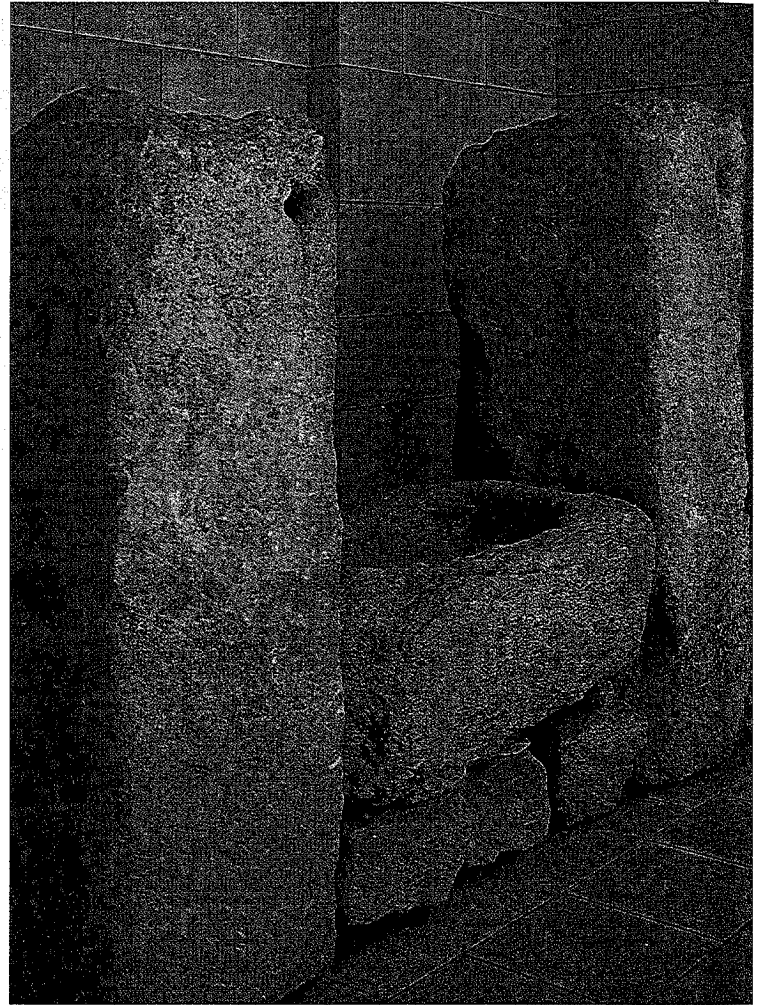
Although Matthew testifies that Mary conceived by the power of God, he emphasizes that Jesus was the son of David by the genealogy at the beginning of the birth narrative and by his focus on the role of Joseph, Jesus' legal father. Through dreams, Joseph received instructions to wed Mary, accept and name the infant Jesus, and move the family when threatened by Herod and then his son Archelaus. Through the use of quotations from the Old Testament, Matthew further demonstrates how Jesus' birth fulfilled messianic prophecies.

Luke's account, on the other hand, frequently illustrates Mary's perspective and includes more personal and family information. His retelling of the annunciation preserves the stirring angelic instruction that Mary received, and her visit to Elizabeth provided both of them with spiritual confirmations regarding the roles their sons would play. In addition to details of the night of Jesus' birth, Luke's narrative also includes accounts of the naming and circumcision of Jesus, his presentation in the temple, and his teaching in the temple as a twelve-year-old.

Some of the aspects of the two narratives that traditional tellings of the Christmas story frequently harmonize provide interesting details when read separately. Matthew gives no indication that Joseph himself was from Nazareth, perhaps suggesting that he or his family were from Bethlehem or owned property there, the traditional home of King David, or that Mary was from Bethlehem, perhaps owning land there. In Luke's account, when Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem shortly after their marriage, their accommodations seemed improvised. Interestingly, the word *katalyma*, traditionally translated as "inn" and often interpreted to mean a caravansary or camp, can also mean "guest room" (the other time Luke uses this word, it is for the "upper room" of the Last Supper in Luke 22:11–12). Luke's account features angels and shepherds, who find the child in the well-known manger, whereas Matthew's account has the Magi arrive later, and they find the family by that time living in an actual house.

Joseph seems to have intended to keep the family in Bethlehem, leaving only when warned that Herod wanted to kill the child. Herod's death in 4 B.C. helps date the account, for that is when Joseph brought the family back from Egypt to Nazareth. Finding Herod's unstable son Archelaus ruling in Judea, Joseph, again

warned in a dream, decided to take the family instead to Nazareth, which may have been Mary's home. His fears were justified; ten years later, in A.D. 6, the Romans deposed Archelaus at the instigation of the Jews themselves because of his violence and misrule. This was also the year that P. Sulpicius Quirinus, or "Cyrenius," began his governorship in Syria. Although A.D. 6 is the date Luke seems to give for Jesus' birth, historically, it was the year when Judea became a province.



LIMESTONE MANGER, c. 900 B.C.

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