

## Super Special Shepherds

21 November 2014

Dear Friend,

Christmas greetings to you from the entire staff of **FaithSearch** International. This is the first Christmas since our May tour to the historic land of Jesus. It was a wonderfully enlightening trip and the participants bonded together as only the Holy Spirit could accomplish.

Of course, a memorable visit to **Bethlehem** was essential. This is where the prophet Micah prophesied that our Messiah and Savior would be born:

*“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me **One who will be ruler over Israel**, whose origins are from of old, from days of eternity”* (Micah 5:2, NIV).

In this short letter we offer a precious insight about the birth of Jesus which we hope will bring joy to your heart and insight into the God-ordained event which **occurred in history 2,000 years ago**. Perhaps you will share it with your friends and family during the upcoming holiday. We also ask you to consider prayerfully making a **special year-end donation**, which could be *doubled* by a matching gift.

### Not Ordinary Shepherds

Ordinary shepherds were despised as unclean by the priests in Jerusalem. They would never be allowed to deliver ritually clean lambs for Temple sacrifice. A passage in the Jewish Mishnah makes it clear that the flocks between Bethlehem and Jerusalem were Temple flocks, specifically raised for sacrifice. Also, those who attended them were **shepherd-priests** who assured that the lambs were ritually clean.

### A SIGN For You

The angels who announced the birth of Jesus gave these shepherd-priests a “*sign*” which they were **especially qualified to understand**: “*you will find a baby wrapped in cloths* [Greek: “having been swathed”] *and lying in a manger*” (Luke 2:12). Perhaps it would be unusual for a human baby to be placed in a “feeding trough” after birth—which is the literal meaning of “manger”! It was the first part of the sign which would have aroused a sensation among these shepherds.

### Swaddling Clothes

It is quite likely that when Joseph and Mary found no other place to stay in Bethlehem, they were allowed to occupy a **ritually-clean cave used by the shepherd-priests** for the birthing of sacrificial lambs for the temple in Jerusalem. These first-born male lambs had a special destiny: they were **reserved as “Passover lambs”** for the sin sacrifice offering. Again, according to the Mishnah, these lambs were immediately upon birth “*swathed*” or wrapped in strips of cloth to protect them from injury, since any blemish would disqualify the lamb for the sin offering.



Our 2014 “Who Do You Say I Am?” tour of the Holy Land was an opportunity to walk where Jesus walked, and see firsthand some of the evidence for the truth of the Gospel message.



Finding the newborn Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes would hold special meaning for shepherd-priests of the first century



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Thank you!

## A Savior, Who Is Christ [Messiah] the Lord (Luke 2:11)

Thus, the “sign” of the firstborn son wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a feeding trough (where they also placed the wrapped new-born lambs) would have communicated **special significance to these shepherd-priests**. This firstborn son was being **appointed by God for a destiny at the Temple in Jerusalem** to redeem “*all the people*” from their sin—“*good news of great joy*” indeed!

The Bible tells us that these shepherds “*made known the statement which had been told them about this Child*” (Luke 2:17). Perhaps it was when they delivered some lambs to the Temple in the following days that their message fell on the ears of Simeon and Anna, to prepare them for their inspired response to Jesus at His dedication eight days later (Luke 2:25-38).

The announcement was also not lost on the devil himself. When Jesus began His ministry (see Matthew 4) Satan quoted Psalm 91:11-12 in the second temptation. The tempter challenged Jesus that if He was indeed the Son of God, He should throw Himself off the pinnacle of the Temple, because it is written, “...*He will give His angels charge concerning You...lest You strike Your foot against a stone.*” **Was this a reference to the custom of using swaddling clothes on first-born male lambs?** The implication would be that if He sinned by doubting God’s protection—or if God didn’t protect Him from injury in the fall—He would be rendered unfit to be the *unblemished lamb of God* for the sin sacrifice, and He would not be qualified to be the Savior, as was announced by the angel at His birth.

### FaithSearch Shepherds

The evangelism ministry of **FaithSearch** International is **celebrating thirty-five years** of continuing the shepherds’ proclamation about this Child! The Gospel we proclaim to “*all peoples everywhere*” (Acts 1:8) continues to be incredibly “*good news.*”

**Men, women, and children are being saved**, believers are **encouraged and strengthened** in their faith, and many go out with **new zeal and new ability to proclaim Him** in their networks of influence. It matters not whether **Oleg** is the messenger in Russia; **Reuben** in India; or **Joe, Scott, Kristi, Rick, Pat, Julie, and Don** throughout the U.S.—the Gospel with evidence is being proclaimed powerfully and is consistently changing lives.

### Shepherds ALL

All of us at **FaithSearch** are honored to serve as ambassadors of Jesus, and we are humbled to acknowledge the **70,000 professions of faith**, the **two million plus** who have heard the Good News through us, and the distribution of our Gospel publications around the world—**none of which has been possible without the prayer and financial partnership of hundreds of FaithSearch friends.**

It is a sobering fact that **we are all shepherds**, making known the message about the Savior. In fact, we are shepherd-priests. The apostle Peter refers to all believers as a “*Royal Priesthood...a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*” (1 Peter 2:9). **That’s what we can do together!**

Together, right now, we have a special opportunity to **multiply the impact** of gifts to the ministry through the generosity of another friend of **FaithSearch**. Through the end of the year, each gift will be **matched, dollar-for-dollar, up to \$5,000**. Please **consider prayerfully** how God would have you respond to this opportunity, and let us know by returning the response form **before the end of the year**.

Thank you for your consideration; it means a lot to all of us here at **FaithSearch**. Your partnership would be precious in our sight. This Christmas, rejoice with us that our ministry has helped to change the eternal destiny of many who have discovered the joy of “*Immanuel*” (Matthew 1:23) for the first time.

Always proclaiming the “*good news of great joy,*”



Dr. Don Bierle  
President, **FaithSearch** International



Joe Komarek  
Executive Director, **FaithSearch** International



PS: For the first time, we have created a 2015 **FaithSearch** Calendar. When you send a **gift before the end** of the year, or indicate on the response card that you will **pray for us during 2015**, we will send you a calendar to say “Thank you.” You can use it as a reminder and guide for your prayers, too.