

## Did You Know This About The Birth Of Jesus?

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Mary and Joseph found themselves in Bethlehem due to the decree of Caesar Augustus that required Roman subjects, citizens or not, to return to their family's land of origin. Joseph traveled with Mary to "David's city, which is called Bethlehem, because of his being a member of the house and family of David" (Luke 2:1-4).

According to the Scriptures, the conditions surrounding Jesus' birth, particularly the patrimony of the child, was less than self-evident. Mary confessed to Joseph that she was with child by the Will of God. Adultery was punishable by stoning in Jewish law. Even though Mary and Joseph had

never engaged in a sexual relationship, Joseph elected to declare himself father of the child Jesus after an angel assured Joseph that the child that Mary had conceived was "from the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:20).

Jesus' family, though humble, had powerful ancestral claims and family connections that could make Jesus' path to acceptance a little easier. Although he was by far not the only one who could make such claims, Jesus, through Joseph who had recognized Jesus as his son, could claim direct descent from both King David and King Solomon of Israel (Matt 1:1-16).

Through his mother's side, Jesus was related to the family of Zechariah. Zechariah was chosen by Lot as the priest to make an offering of incense in the Temple of Jerusalem. It was there during the ceremony that he received the revelation that his wife Elisabeth would bear him a son (Luke 1:13) who would go forward "in the spirit and the power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17).

When Zechariah's wife Elisabeth encountered her cousin Mary, she heralded the birth of Jesus and called her the "mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43). Elisabeth's unborn son John, we are told, leaped in the womb when Mary visited Elisabeth there in the house of Zechariah (Luke 1:38-43)

Yet there is no indication that Elisabeth and Zechariah who lived near Bethlehem, visited Mary and Joseph at the time of Jesus' birth. When there was no room at the inn (Luke 2:7), there is no mention that Mary contacted Elisabeth for help or that Elisabeth offered appropriate shelter to the one whom she had called her "Lord" (Luke 1:43), the one before whom her son leaped in her womb (Luke 1:44). There is no biblical record of contact between the two families after the three months that the two mothers spent together in the house of Zechariah prior to Mary's return to Nazareth.

When Zechariah's son John first encountered "the Nazarene," he said, "I myself did not know him" (John 1:31), suggesting that John had not been mentored by Elisabeth or Zechariah to recognize Jesus as the awaited one.

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Skeptics may understandably question how Jesus could be born of the Holy Spirit. In his weaker moments, Jesus' stepfather Joseph even may have wondered who Jesus' father really was and waived about whether or not his "illegitimate" son could actually be the Messiah. Jesus, an extremely sensitive child, would have sensed the torment in Joseph or guardedness in Mary if those feelings existed. The following example illustrates this:

While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you."

He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt 12:46-50).

Does Jesus' reaction here suggest that his family was not doing the will of God and that all was not well in the House of Joseph?