

# THE CHRONOLOGY FROM MARY'S BETROTHAL TO THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

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(In the February issue)

- I. JEWISH MARRIAGE LAWS AND CUSTOMS
- II. MARY AS A SPOUSE
- III. THE ANNUNCIATION, LK. 1, 34
- IV. THE VISITATION, LK. 1, 39-40
- V. MARY'S RETURN TO NAZARETH, LK. 1, 56

(In the present issue)

- VI. SAINT JOSEPH'S EMBARRASSMENT, MT. 1, 18-25
- VII. THE SECRECY ABOUT THE CONCEPTION OF CHRIST
- VIII. THE SEASON OF THE JEWISH WEDDING FEAST
- IX. THE SEASON OF THE CENSUS
- X. THE JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM

## VI. ST. JOSEPH'S EMBARRASSMENT, MT. 1, 18-25

We shall take Mt. 1, 24 as a starting point. Joseph, after having received the order of the Angel, "rising up from his sleep, did as the Angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took unto him his wife." This last expression refers to the wedding; it is moulded throughout in terms of Jewish law. We have already observed (p. 148) that the Jews called the wedding "the taking" (*nissu'in* or *liqquhin*). After her betrothal Mary was legally called Joseph's wife (p. 155). There can, therefore, be no doubt about the meaning of the expression.

The question of time occurs; what is the exact meaning of "rising up from his sleep (he) did . . ."? ἐγερθεῖς followed by a finite verb means to rise physically in nearly all the Gospel passages as ἀναστᾶς<sup>68</sup> often does. But, the first verb seldom expresses merely the beginning of a new action; perhaps in Mt. 9, 19 it is used so. If order and execution are expressed by it and a finite verb in the identical or nearly identical form,

<sup>68</sup>Lk. 5, 24-25; 11, 7-8.

the usual meaning of rising bodily is enlarged by the element of suddenness or of the immediate.<sup>69</sup> In our passage it is combined with *from his sleep*, and must mean: *rising bodily from sleep*. But this is not the whole significance of the expression; that Joseph had to get up first, before he could carry out the Angel's order, is too obvious to be mentioned. There must also be the element of the *immediate* in the expression. Wherever an order and its execution are expressed by the same, or nearly the same, phrase as in the present context, the order is a comparatively short phrase. In Mt. 1, 20-21, on the contrary, it is so long, that where the execution is recounted, it had to be compressed into the phrase: *he did as the angel, etc.* As the angel started with the reassuring expression, "Fear not" and added an explanation, the phrase *rising* could not easily find a place. Virtually, therefore, *And Joseph rising up from sleep* expresses the same meaning as the reduplicated phrase.

We can, then, place the time of Joseph's wedding immediately after his dream and the Angel's order. This does not exclude such preparations as would fill the last days before a marriage. When Joseph "rising up from his sleep, did as the Angel of the Lord had commanded him and took unto him his wife," he most probably began the preparations, in the execution of which he had been previously handicapped by his worries and embarrassment. Between the dream and the wedding some days must have passed.

This conclusion is confirmed by the following consideration. Joseph had already made up his mind to sever the bond of betrothal by a letter of divorce. But he certainly did not intend to carry out this on the very day of the wedding, because he wished to shield Mary (Mt. 1, 19). Before he carried out his resolution, the Angel showed him which way to follow. Hence Joseph's dream cannot have taken place during the night immediately preceding the prearranged wedding-day.

Here again we have to emphasize that the time, if not the day, of the wedding had been fixed by the date of the betrothal. "They give to a virgin twelve months from the time her husband has asked her (to marry him), and as they give it to

<sup>69</sup>Mt. 2, 13-14; 2, 20-21; 9, 6-7.

the woman, so they also give it to the man, that he may make his preparations."<sup>70</sup> That the engagement should last an entire year was an old, established law;<sup>71</sup> but it was equally recognised that twelve months should not be exceeded. To prevent this, wholesome precautions were taken. "If the time (for marriage) has come without (the brides') having been taken (by wedding to the homes of their bridegrooms) they (are entitled) to eat from their (the bridegrooms') property," that is, henceforth the bridegrooms had to support their brides.<sup>72</sup> Such a means must have infallibly procured its effect.

Consequently it was, as a rule, neither possible to postpone a wedding nor to anticipate it, except by a margin of a few days. Therefore, the expression in Mt. 1, 24, cannot mean that Joseph now hastened his wedding. The Angel's word, "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife," retained its full meaning, if it referred to the pre-established date of the marriage.

With such a temporal connection we can understand better Joseph's embarrassment and the fact of a divine message. His worries cannot have lasted for months. If they had, we should have to charge Joseph with a considerable lack of decision. Later chapters of this paper will show that this is not the case. The other alternative, then, is, that he wanted to postpone the divorce of his bride to a time shortly before their "not to expose her publicly" (Mt. 1, 19); for if a bride was dis-fixed wedding day. This again is excluded by his intention missed shortly before her wedding, something would be thought amiss with her. The decisive reason against a long period of Joseph's anxieties is this: Mary's condition did not become known to the inhabitants of Nazareth (see next section); as she was already well on in her fourth month, this would perhaps have been a question of only some weeks. Besides this reason, we can understand God's intervention better, if Joseph could not wait with his decision, relying on the principle that every road has a turning. The shorter a time circumstances

<sup>70</sup>*K<sup>a</sup>tbuboth* 5, 2.

<sup>71</sup>*N<sup>a</sup>darim* 10, 5; *K<sup>a</sup>tbuboth* 57 b.

<sup>72</sup>*K<sup>a</sup>tbuboth* 5, 2; as an acknowledged principle alleged in *K<sup>a</sup>tb.* 2 b.

allowed him to deliberate which step to take, the more painful was his position. And he stood in need of some extraordinary light, all the more so, since his resolution to divorce Mary very likely did not satisfy him. We may safely assume that his embarrassment lasted only a few days.

Joseph's anxieties began naturally at the very hour that Mary "was found with child of the Holy Ghost" (Mt. 1.18). The only question to be answered here is: what was the temporal relation between Mary's return to Nazareth and the hour when Joseph learnt that his bride was with child? This question is answered implicitly in the foregoing chapter; the impending wedding obliged Mary to return to Nazareth. Joseph received his information about her condition within a few days after her arrival, so that these days together with the days of his worries and of the last preparation filled the short interval before the wedding.

## VII. THE SECRECY ABOUT THE CONCEPTION OF CHRIST

1. THE IGNORANCE OF THE NAZARITES. It is a decisive point in this present inquiry to know whether or not Mary's pregnancy became publicly known at Nazareth. Could the womenfolk have found it out in the course of time, especially at the time of her approaching delivery? If so, slander and insult certainly must have been directed against the Blessed Virgin, and later against Jesus himself. Because, as we have shown above,<sup>73</sup> sexual intercourse of the betrothed was commonly looked upon as a disgrace, and no other happening would have supplied the female tongues of a small village with a more titillating subject. Suspicion would be all the more certain, if, as the *Magnificat* seems to indicate, some people at Nazareth had been hostile to Mary. Our present problem can be solved by the reports about the preaching of Jesus in the Synagogue of Nazareth some 35 to 37 years later.

In Mc. 6, 1-6<sup>74</sup> Jesus as Messiah paid a short visit to Nazareth. As was to be expected of the inhabitants of a tiny village with their all too narrow spiritual horizon, Jesus' knowledge and

<sup>73</sup>THEOLOGICAL STUDIES, 2 (May 1941) 1, 147-154.

<sup>74</sup>Mk. 6, 1-6 = Mt. 13, 53-58 = Lk. 4, 15-30.

wisdom not only surprised them, but offended them.<sup>75</sup> In order to prove to themselves and to everybody else that Jesus could not claim to be more than an ordinary Nazarite, flesh of their flesh and bone of their bone, they brought forward all they knew against His pretended higher standing. He was but the son of the carpenter,<sup>76</sup> and of Mary (Mc 6, 3), Himself an ordinary carpenter (Mc 6, 3); his male and female relatives were known well enough, as some of them lived at Nazareth.<sup>77</sup> Thus the Nazarites did their best to drag Jesus down to their own level. By doing so they thought they would not be forced to admit his superiority and his extraordinary claims, a procedure foolish enough, yet no doubt genuinely human.

Obviously the Nazarites knew absolutely nothing about Jesus' supernatural Incarnation. As far as their knowledge went, He was just an ordinary human being. But their unmistakable tendency to make Him as human as possible carries us one step further. They found no reason to blame him on account of His nativity. If they could have done so, they most certainly would have. Nothing else would have served their purpose of belittling him so surely as to point out moral defects in His parents at the time when He came into human existence. Had it been known that His conception had taken place previous to the marriage of Mary and Joseph, all His claims in the eyes of the Nazarites, would have been dissipated in an instant; for all we know, they would not even have tolerated Him as an ordinary teacher. There is an expressive confirmation of this in Jo 9, 34, "Thou wast wholly born in sins, and dost thou teach us?" It was against the very grain of the Jews to accept religious instruction from any one whose parents had given life to their child outside the pale of convention.

One could raise the objection that the scene in the synagogue at Nazareth took place well over 30 years after Jesus' conception and birth. But this difficulty vanishes into thin air, if we take into account the memory of villagers, especially in the

<sup>75</sup>Mk. 6, 3, "They were scandalized in regard of him."

<sup>76</sup>Mt. 13, 55; Lk. 4, 22.

<sup>77</sup>Mk. 6, 3; Mt. 13, 56.

orient. Dr. Hilma Granquist, in her extremely valuable work on *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village*<sup>78</sup> could get reliable information concerning the marriages of a full century. The memories of the women of the village proved, particularly in this matter, to be living chronicles of village life. The difference of time, therefore, does not come into consideration at all.

These considerations enable us to conclude that about the conception of Jesus nothing had leaked out to the villagers of Nazareth at the time, and that later on they never had a chance to figure out the approximate date of it. They never knew just when Jesus was born. Their lack of knowledge also implies that they had not been able to draw conclusions from the various stages of Mary's pregnancy.

Here, then, we can take two decisive steps as to the relative chronology of the events. First: When Mary celebrated her wedding with Joseph, her pregnancy was not perceptible. In all likelihood she was not yet in her fifth month. Our theory that she returned from Elisabeth because of her impending marriage, is hereby strongly confirmed. She was then in her fourth month, probably towards the end of it, at which state, according to doctors and medical women, pregnancy, as a rule, is not yet perceptible even to people who live in the greatest possible intimacy with a young expectant mother. When Mary, according to custom was dressed and adorned for the wedding, by her maiden friends, her condition, if far enough advanced, would never have escaped the quick eyes of these women.

Secondly: Mary, for all we know now, very soon after her wedding must have disappeared from the eyes of the Nazarites. She must have left Nazareth altogether, otherwise the ignorance of the Nazarites is not accounted for. For this somewhat startling conclusion we shall gain confirmation later on.

2. HOW JOSEPH LEARNED THE TRUTH. Another problem has to be faced here: If nobody could realise Mary's state at the

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<sup>78</sup>Vol. I, Helsingfors 1931, pg. 12: "What I present here is a comparative examination of all the marriages in the village of Artas during a hundred years; so far back could the memory of the people reach, that is to say four to five generations."

time of her marriage, how did Joseph know about it? The common opinion is that which St. Jerome adopted in his well-known explanation of Mt. 1, 18: *Non ab alio inventa est nisi a Joseph qui pene licentia maritali futurae uxoris omnia noverat.*<sup>79</sup> Now a *licentia maritalis* did not exist, as the first chapter of our study has made clear. St. Jerome here, as in many other places, seems to have worked somewhat hurriedly. True, according to some rabbis pregnancy was perceptible after three months.<sup>80</sup> As an instance Genesis 38, 24 is quoted. About three months, after Judah and Tamar had met, Judah was told that Tamar, thy daughter-in-law, had fallen, and in consequence of her licentiousness, was great with child. A rabbinic rule had it that pregnancy was perceptible "after the first third part of its total duration," whether it concerned a seven months' child or a nine month's child.<sup>81</sup> But it is not said who would be able to make a statement about the expectant mother. There is no difficulty in admitting, that the woman herself, after her third month, is, as a rule, able to give an account of her state with some certainty. As far as other people are concerned, we can find only one passage in Jewish sources; according to the Babylonian Talmud one is able to discover a pregnant woman by the way she walks.<sup>82</sup> But no time is pointed at, nor is this rule, as far as we could see, alleged anywhere else, notwithstanding the minute care of the old rabbis in all such matters. *Genesis Rabba* explicitly admits<sup>83</sup> that the pregnancy of Lea's maid Silpa could not be noticed because of her youth. All, then, we can say, is that Mary, when she returned to Nazareth, being in her fourth month, was able to give a reliable account of her condition, but no one else.

If we turn to the text in Mt. 1, 18-19, we notice that it does not say who it was who discovered a change in Mary. It rather suggests that it was not Joseph himself. Mt. 1, 18-19 contains three statements, with a remarkable turn in the second of them.

<sup>79</sup>*Comm. in Ev. Matth.*, Pl 26, 24 B.

<sup>80</sup>*Nidda* 8 b.

<sup>81</sup>*Sanbedrin* 69 a.

<sup>82</sup>Bah<sup>a</sup>luka. *J<sup>e</sup>bamoth* 42 a.

<sup>83</sup>*Gn. R.* 71, 9, quoted in S. Krauss, *Talmudische Archaeologie* II, p. 426.

The first begins by calling the reader's attention to Joseph, about whom this section gives a report; he is the central figure in 1, 18-25. "When Mary his mother was espoused to Joseph . . ." Similarly Joseph is in full view in the third statement: "Whereupon Joseph, her husband, being a just man . . . was minded . . ." In contrast with these statements the second statement is put in the impersonal passive form. "Before they came together, *she was found* with child of the Holy Ghost." Inserted between direct statements about Joseph this change of attitude in the central statement implies, that Joseph who learnt the truth about Mary, was not the person who discovered it. That it was something to this effect which the author wished to suggest, may be gathered from the only possible view, that the change of the narrative form was due to his deliberate choice. Three things, therefore, are quite in keeping with one another: a) that Mary by that time was only in her fourth month, b) that Joseph in no way enjoyed the *licentia maritalis* or any degree of intimacy with his bride, and c) the text of Mt. 1, 18-19.

If, then, Mary at the time was in her fourth month, and nobody was able to realize it by direct observation, it follows, that Joseph learned the truth, at least ultimately, from Mary. Mary certainly was not less *righteous* than was Joseph (Mt. 1, 19) who not only fulfilled the requirements of the Law, but was also thoughtful of others. At Cana Mary revealed a high degree of thoughtfulness. It must have been a matter of great concern to her, whether her fiancé supposed her to be a virgin in the common sense of the word, or knew the truth about her before he married her. To leave him uninformed, well-nigh amounted to cheating. Hence Mary herself must have wished to let Joseph know about her state.

However, there are reasons to think that Mary did not inform Joseph by herself. Had she done so, Joseph could hardly have failed to learn the full truth which apparently was not the case. His worries would have taken an altogether different course, and most certainly he would not have had to consider what it meant for Mary "publicly to expose her." (Mt. 1, 19)



It was therefore most likely through another person that Joseph received the news about Mary. Somehow we can describe the character of this person. Considering the ignorance that prevailed at Nazareth in later years, we can say with certainty that she did not betray Mary; she proved trustworthy. Which person the Blessed Virgin chose as her go-between, we do not know. But here again, as when Mary had to arrange her journey to Elisabeth, the most likely person was her mother. How fully the mother reported to Joseph the details of the matter about time, place, etc., is hard to say. Joseph's decision, before the Angel visited him, seems to suggest that she had passed a remark to him about Mary's absolute innocence, and possibly also a special divine providence. Such a situation may have been intended in the expression in Mt. 1, 18, that she was found with child "of the Holy Ghost." If we thus suppose that the knowledge came to Joseph by an intermediary, who made Joseph understand that there was some secret in the case, we can explain why Joseph, on learning about the state of his bride, did not question her. The reason was: he knew that she did not wish it.

#### VIII. THE SEASON OF THE JEWISH WEDDING-FEAST (Mt. 1, 24)

The relative chronology of the events round Mary's betrothal and marriage would become more clear, if we knew both the season of her wedding and of St. Joseph's journey to Bethlehem for the census. No certainty can be obtained here. But we may attain probability, if we work on the supposition that Mary's wedding and the journey to Bethlehem took place at the seasons at which such events usually did take place. This supposition is the only reasonable one, notwithstanding the possibility that in the case of Joseph and Mary other times might have been chosen. Such a mere possibility does not deprive an *argumentum e communiter contingentibus* of its merits. This seems to be a very superfluous remark; but considering the attitude of many who should know better, it is by no means out of the way.

1. The wedding-feast of Mary and Joseph took place in

accordance with Jewish customs, and in a small village far away in the country-side. As to the period of the year, the Jewish sources unfortunately yield hardly any information on the point at issue. That the sabbath days and feast days were considered as forbidden days for marriages,<sup>84</sup> and that at a later period the interval between Pascha and Pentecost was added to the forbidden time,<sup>85</sup> are the only data about the time of weddings. This silence very likely may be explained from the fact that the sources (*Talmudim, Mishna, Midraschim*) reflect in the main, the pharisaic life in the centers of learning, or at any rate, in towns, and relatively seldom reflect at all upon the life in the country.

2. There remains the other source of information, the modern customs in Palestine. As a wedding in the olden times was a feast for practically the whole village and still is, the normal time for such feasts is somehow determined by the rhythm of the farmers' life with its periods of labour and of comparative inactivity. Only in the latter periods would the villagers be at leisure to enjoy a wedding feast.

Our sources here are G. Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palestina*,<sup>86</sup> and H. Granquist, *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village*.<sup>87</sup> Dr. Granquist's results, although nearly exclusively gathered at Artas near Bethlehem, can be considered as typical for all Palestine. Some slight differences in the hotter districts along the Jordan do not concern us. Similarly we have not to take into account importations from the Mohammedan religion. It is of no account to our purpose that in the month of Ramadan weddings are not celebrated.

It is a general rule that during the harvest season hardly anybody marries. Once when such a wedding took place, a woman said to Dr. Granquist: "There are not many who marry at the time of the harvest."<sup>88</sup> The reasons are patent. At the time of harvest nobody has the leisure necessary to at-

<sup>84</sup>Compare Billerbeck II, p. 396.

<sup>85</sup>Th. Schaerf, *Das gottesdienstliche Jahr der Juden*, Leipzig 1902, p. 35.

<sup>86</sup>I-IV, Guetersloh 1928-1935.

<sup>87</sup>I-II, Helsingfors 1931-1935.

<sup>88</sup>I, p. 107.

tend a festival protracted over several days. At Artas, before a wedding, preliminary festivals are held, the people of the entire village dancing on the evenings of the three or even seven previous nights.<sup>89</sup> Then follows the conducting of the bride to the bridegroom's house, where a banquet is held. On the subsequent seven days visits are paid to the newly married couple, with daily banquets.<sup>90</sup> Somewhat different but of equal duration, were the marriage feasts of the ancient Jews. One heard "the jubilant shouts of the young men at the banquet"<sup>91</sup> for seven successive days,<sup>92</sup> if the bride was a virgin. These festivities were simply called *joy* (*simḥa*), more often *carousel mište*, aramaic, *mištutha*).<sup>93</sup> It was but natural that weddings were not easily celebrated during times burdened with agricultural work such as harvesting. In consequence these months never were considered suitable times for marriage feasts.

For good reasons the winter months were equally shunned. It is a general custom in Palestine to hold banquets in the open, partly because of the lack of halls big enough for the crowd, partly of the universal oriental preference for the open. Therefore a proverb says: "(Only) the wedding of mad ones is in December and January."<sup>94</sup> Besides, at this period of the year, the provisions stored up after the harvest, have already been considerably depleted. "Who married during *kanun* (December and January) licks his cooking pots," says another proverb.<sup>95</sup> Hence the suitable times for an ordinary marriage are limited to the spells between the harvest and the winter with its tilling and sowing and weeding during or after the rainfalls.

Indeed Palestinian sayings praise weddings celebrated in the month of April because of the fresh products then available. "Who marries in April, eats meat and eggs, milk and vegetables."<sup>96</sup> The marriage at Kana (Jo. 2, 1-11) was held at this

<sup>89</sup>Granquist II, p. 39.

<sup>90</sup>*ibid.* p. 134-138.

<sup>91</sup>*K'thuboth* 8a.

<sup>92</sup>*Sukka* 25 b; *K'thuboth* 4 a; about a virgin's wedding *K'thuboth* 7 b.

<sup>93</sup>Billerbeck II, p. 372.

<sup>94</sup>Granquist II, p. 37.

<sup>95</sup>Dalman I, p. 266.

<sup>96</sup>Dalman I, p. 266.

season of the year. Notwithstanding this praise, the spring products do not fully replace the dwindled stores of last summer.

3. The real time for weddings begins in summer after the harvest. "The carpet of summer is wide."<sup>97</sup> But the climax of the regular wedding season is in the autumn. Dr. Granquist describes her experience as follows: "If one has not celebrated the weddings after the wheat harvest at the end of May and the beginning of June, one hastens to do it before winter sets in. It is a striking fact that although the summer is so long, a wedding is often postponed till the autumn; then it is easier, when there is no hurry to get work done and the clay cupboards are filled with corn and wheat and raisins and dry figs."<sup>98</sup>

This last reason must have had the same compelling force in ancient times. For the Jews at the time of Christ it was even stronger than for the Mohammedan villagers of today. For the harvest of the raisin was a most important date for marriage feasts. The Jews had no coffee; they used wine. The very name *carousel* (*mište*) is a proof. New wine was well liked and marriages could be celebrated only when large quantities of it were on hand.<sup>99</sup> The harvest of the raisin in Palestine takes place from about the middle of August till the second half of September. The most suitable time for Jewish weddings, then, was after the vintage in September. It was not surprising that at the wedding feast at Kana in April the wine ran short, or that Our Lord supplied them with such a quantity of this drink.

We can, then, with the best reasons apply to the olden times what Dr. Granquist says about modern times: "In the autumn of 1925 and 1926, when I first lived in the village, weddings followed each other very closely; several weddings could be celebrated on the same day, or one man's betrothal and another man's wedding on the same day. Thus one gets a curiously concentrated time of joy, further increased by the

<sup>97</sup>Granquist II, p. 32.

<sup>98</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>99</sup>Dalman IV, p. 372, he quotes Joel 1, 5; 4, 18; Amos 9, 13; Is. 49, 26; he speaks of the harvest of raisins pp. 335-340.

fact that it is only the moonlight nights that can be used, because the moon is needed for illumination. The times of the full moon in October and November are thus right times for wedding festivals in Artas. Very seldom did we arrive at the village during this period without hearing the shouts of joy; the sound of dancing and singing for some wedding reached us in the mountains."<sup>100</sup> Since the village life of Mary and Joseph was well nigh identical with the village life of modern Palestine, we are entitled to place the wedding of Mary and Joseph in the autumn season, with October as the most probable month, leaving a possibility for the last part of September and the first of November; for then the first rain begins to threaten.

#### IX. THE SEASON OF THE CENSUS

The famous decree of C. Vibius Maximus, the Prefect of Egypt, of the year 102 A.D.<sup>101</sup> ordering everybody to return "to their own hearth" for the census, so exactly expresses what we read in Lk. 2, 1-3, that this measure must have been taken as early as 9-8 B.C., the most likely date for St. Luke's census. Joseph had to go to Bethlehem. Mary had to accompany him because of the *eikonismos*, a kind of identification required of her as well as of Joseph. Such had been the practice of the Ptolemean kings of Egypt from the fourth century B.C. The Romans adopted it in connection with the census, each fourteen years, the first of which seems to have been the one to which Lk. 2, 1-3 refers. Each census was a household census.<sup>102</sup>

For every census a decree was issued. Analogous to the decree (*dogma*) which "went out from Caesar Augustus" (Lk. 2, 1), the *apographe* documents often use the term "according to the orders of N. N." Were these decrees obligatory for an entire year, or for a definite part only? Common sense would suggest that the census had to be carried out within a limited time of the census year, for two reasons. First, it is

<sup>100</sup>Granquist II, p. 32-33.

<sup>101</sup>L. Mitteis-U. Wilcken, *Grundzuge und Chrestomathie der Papyruskunde* I/2, Leipzig 1912, pp. 235-237.

<sup>102</sup>On the identification see J. Hasebroek, *Das Signalement in den Papyrusurkunden* (*Papyrusinstitut Heidelberg* 3), Berlin 1927.

unlikely that the officials sat waiting endlessly for people to turn up for their reports. Secondly, because the majority of the population of Egypt consisted of farmers who could not leave their work.<sup>103</sup> Hence, V. Vibius Maximus probably ordered those who were exempt from the obligation of returning to their home places, to report for the census "within the present month of Epiph."<sup>104</sup>

Fortunately the census documents were all dated as exactly as documents are dated nowadays. If we wish to be sure whether there was a certain season for the census, all we have to do is to collect and study their dates. As the dates were written at the end of the documents, many papyri have lost them, the lower part having crumbled away. For the following inquiry as many documents were consulted as possible. Our list will not be complete, but we trust that our basis is broad enough to support some general conclusions. Documents of the pre-Roman period were of no avail, partly, because they lack the dates, partly, because these census' were connected with the report of the amount of corn which the reporting person actually owned.

The documents available for this study were issued in the following months:

	In the month of	were issued
Thoth	August 29-September 27	0 documents <sup>105</sup>
Phaophi	September 28-October 27	3 " 106
Arthur	October 28-November 26	4 " 107
Choiak	November 27-December 26	5 " 108
Tubi	December 27-January 25	1 " 109
Mecheir	January 26-February 24	0 " 110
Phamenoth	February 25-March 26	1 " 111
Pharmuthi	March 27-April 25	1 " 112
Pachon	April 26-May 25	4 " 113
Pauni	May 26-June 24	6 " 114
Epiph	June 25-July 24	11 " 115
Mesore	July 25-August 23	} 12 " 116
Intercalated	August 24-August 28	

<sup>103</sup>An analogous case is the report of live-stock; this report was due in the month of Mecheir (February); documents concerning camels are: BGU (*Berliner Griechische Urkunden*) No. 51, 192, 352, 357, 358, 629, 762, 1582; about donkeys: PSI (*Pubblicazioni della Società Italiana per la ricerca dei papiri greci e latini in Egitto*) No. 785; about sheep and goats: Ox (*Oxyrhynchus Papyri*) No. 74, 244, 245, 351, 352, 356; PSI 40; SA (F. Preisigke-F. Bilabel, *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Aegypten*) No. 5277. Documents of this kind issued at other periods of the year are scarce.

<sup>104</sup> ἐντος . . . ἐν εὐστατίῳ μηνὸς Ἐπίφ[ειφ . . .]

These documents cover a period of three centuries, and were issued at various places in Egypt, mostly in the Fayyoun. This variety makes it impossible to give an exact reason for the date of each single document. But taken as a whole they tell their tale. We notice that the documents dated in the months May-June-July-August arrange themselves into an increasing series. It is not difficult to find a reason for it. April and May were the months when the wheat was harvested.<sup>117</sup> Hence we must conclude that for the farmers the census was carried out in the period after the wheat harvest. There is also a second opportune period, the months of October-November-December.

As to this last month there remain some doubts. Four of the December documents were issued in the same year, 132 A.D.<sup>118</sup> In the same year also one November document was written.<sup>119</sup> It is not impossible that there had been a special reason why, in this one year, the census took place so late. The fifth of the December documents, with the date 90 A.D., shows a form somewhat different from the form of the ordinary census documents. These observations suggest that not too much weight should be put on the December documents,

<sup>105</sup>The Papyri editions consulted did not yield any document of the 14 years' cycle dated in Thoth.

<sup>106</sup>BGU 833; Ox 109, 255.

<sup>107</sup>BGU 26; Ox 480; PSI 53 b col. IV; 63 e col. X.

<sup>108</sup>Hamburg 60; PSI 53 a col. I and II, 53 c col. VIII; 53 g col. XII.

<sup>109</sup>Ox 1547.

<sup>110</sup>As annotation 105.

<sup>111</sup>Mitteis-Wilcken, I/2, No. 208; No. 210 belongs to the Byzantine period.

<sup>112</sup>BGU 577.

<sup>113</sup>Bremen 32, 34, P. Aor 4; PSI 53 c col. VII; Of the Ptolemaean Papyri, Grenfell I, 45 and 46 of the year 19 and 18 B.C. respectively bear this date.

<sup>114</sup>BGU 115, 118(2), 118(3), 184, 1580; SA 5661.

<sup>115</sup>Amherst 74; BGU 53, 54, 95, 154, 182, 1581; Hamburg 7; Ox 479 (which is outside the 14 years' cycle); SA 7460; P. Meyer, *Griechische Texte aus Aegypten*, No. 9.

<sup>116</sup>BGU 55, 90, 116 a, 116 b, 117, 119, 120, 127, 224, 225; PSI 1112; SA 4299; Tebt 322.

<sup>117</sup>A. Wiedemann, *Das alte Aegypten*, Heidelberg 1920, p. 271: "Der aegyptische Weizen war Winterkorn, seine Aussaat fiel in den November, die Vegetationszeit lag in der kuehlen Jahreszeit, die Ernte im April und Mai."

<sup>118</sup>PSI 53 a col. I and II; 53 c; 53 g.

<sup>119</sup>Ox 480.

until further evidence has come to light.<sup>120</sup> In the course of November the sowing of the wheat began. This leaves October and at least the earlier part of November free for the census, and, if required, for the journey involved. Other reasons why these documents were issued so late, we cannot offer.

If we wish to draw any conclusion from Egyptian documents for Palestine, we have first to compare these two countries. They show remarkable differences in soil and temperature. But some important features of the agricultural life were the same in both countries. In both the sowing of the wheat began in November, rather towards the close of it. While the wheat harvest in Egypt was in April and May, in Palestine it took place in May and June. Save this divergency the main rhythm of the agricultural life was, and is, the same in both countries. For this reason it seems most likely that in Palestine too the census was mainly carried out after the wheat harvest (June-August as a first period) and during the time preceding the first rain and the sowing late in November (October and first half of November as a second period).

It is now interesting to compare these periods with the periods of wedding feasts. There too we have found two main periods, a first period less frequently used immediately after the harvest (in summer), and a second period, the preferred season for weddings, in the autumn before the beginning of the labors for the new crops (October and first half of November). The two periods practically coincide, but with an inversion of numbers; most of the census documents belong to the summer period; most of the marriage festivals take place during the autumn period.

Following the ordinary course of events Joseph married Mary during the autumn period, in October-November (first part). Their journey to Bethlehem for the census took place after their wedding, and Jesus, in consequence of this journey, was born at Bethlehem. To these two facts mentioned in the Gospel, we add our conclusion, that Mary at the time of her wedding,

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<sup>120</sup>We should welcome it, if an expert in papyrology made a comprehensive study on the dates of the census documents including also the *laographic* documents, of which a great number on *ostraca* have been found and published.



was in the fourth month of pregnancy. It is obvious that the summer period of the census, in the year of their wedding, could not come into consideration. Nor is it possible that they went to report during the next summer period, because this period began about seven months after their marriage, at which date Jesus would already have been about two months old. Hence the only possibility is that Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem during the autumn period of the year of their marriage, that is: they left Nazareth for Bethlehem very soon after their wedding feast. Here we gain an unexpected confirmation of a statement which we made above<sup>121</sup> and based on altogether different reasons. The people of Nazareth never knew that Jesus was conceived before his mother Mary was married. Therefore, we concluded, soon after her wedding she must have gone elsewhere, away from Nazareth altogether. Here we find, that the journey to Bethlehem must have taken place practically immediately after the wedding. The identity of these conclusions serves to confirm the reasonings which led up to them.

## X. THE JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM

1. According to Lk. 2, 1-4, it was the imperial decree which brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. But this does not exclude other motives for the journey. In order to safeguard his own good name and especially that of Mary and her child, Joseph must have thought of means to conceal her state. The only possible way was to move out of Nazareth. The decree had certainly been promulgated long before it had to be carried out. As soon as Joseph had been taught by the Angel which way to take in his embarrassment, he realized how opportune the decree was. Since he must go to Bethlehem, and as he intended to leave Nazareth for good, he made up his mind to settle down at Bethlehem permanently. That he did so, is supported by the text of the Gospel.

When the Magi came, perhaps a full year after the Nativity, the Holy Family was still at Bethlehem. When returning from his flight to Egypt, Joseph intended to return to Judea, obvi-

<sup>121</sup>Cf. section VII, above.

ously to Bethlehem; this is the only ostensible season for Joseph's decision. By this time he considered Bethlehem as his permanent residence.

The motive of protecting Mary throws some light on the text Lk. 2, 5. Joseph went to Bethlehem "with Mary his espoused wife who was with child." However the minor variants affect this text, the remark that she was *with child*, in our explanation indicates a very personally cogent and urgent motive for leaving Nazareth and taking Mary with him to Bethlehem.

If our conclusions hold good, we readily understand God's economy in the mystery of the Incarnation. The people of Nazareth could never become suspicious about Mary; the time of the Nativity was unknown to them and they could not calculate the date of the Incarnation. Neither did the Bethlehemites have an inkling about the mystery; Joseph and Mary came as a married couple, and Jesus might have been born any time after their arrival.

2. Mary, then, arrived at Bethlehem about five months (or somewhat more) before her confinement. A startling proposition, considering the common opinion that Our Lord's Nativity took place within 24 hours after her arrival at Bethlehem, or not very much later. This common opinion is based upon two alleged indications in the narrative of St. Luke: a) The series of events in this report shows that the Nativity is immediately linked up with the arrival at Bethlehem; b) Jesus was born in a stable, after his parents had tried in vain to find shelter in the village inn. Both these considerations seem to lead the reader to the same conclusion: Jesus must have been born immediately after the arrival of Joseph and Mary at Bethlehem. Nevertheless this conclusion is far from being convincing, if the text is more closely inspected, and account is taken of the technique of the narrative.

Had Joseph and Mary arrived immediately before Jesus' birth, one might expect to read in Lk. 2, 6: "And it came to pass, that when they *arrived* (or *came*) there . . ." Yet the text reads: "And it came to pass, that when they *were* there, her days were accomplished, that she should be delivered." By this expression the sacred text not only leaves the time

between the arrival at Bethlehem and the Nativity an open question; it suggests that an appreciable length of time elapsed between the events. Some exegetes have taken notice of this unassuming phrase and admit that Jesus was not born immediately after Joseph and Mary had come to Bethlehem.<sup>122</sup>

In connection with this another point may be mentioned. A woman who is in her last days with child, does not readily undertake a three days' journey either walking or riding. Only by force of dire necessity does she do so. Nor does a husband with any consideration for his wife expose her to such a hardship and the dangers to herself and her baby. Strangely enough in only one author do we find a remark bearing on this point. G. L. Hahn observes: "Wie bald nach ihrer Ankunft das ἐπλήσθησαν eingetreten, wird nicht gesagt. Doch darft die Zwischenzeit nicht ganz kurz gedacht werden, da Maria kurz vor dem entscheidenden Zeitpunkt die Reise schwerlich unternommen haben würde."<sup>123</sup> Our explanation certainly commends itself by avoiding this hard and improbable assumption.

If there was a lapse of time between the arrival and the Nativity, the explanation of the inn and the crib, as it is commonly given and preached, must be abandoned, or is, at least, made more complicated. Events of no importance to the narration in the Gospels and matters of course are often enough omitted.<sup>124</sup> There is no need to prove this well-known fact. Hence because the narrative records only the motive for the journey, the journey itself, and the birth, one must not infer that these events followed each other in an immediate temporal succession. Should there be reasons suggesting that the temporal connection was a loose one, as we think we have found, the technique of the report is by no means an obstacle to them.

<sup>122</sup>M.-J. Lagrange, *Evangile selon s. Luc*,<sup>3</sup> Paris 1927, p. 70; A. Nebe, *Die Kindheitsgeschichte Unseres Herrn Jesu Christi*, Stuttgart 1893, p. 279; K. Bornhauser, *Die Geburts = und Kindheitsgeschichte Jesu*. Guetersloh 1930, p. 101.

<sup>123</sup>*Das Evangelium des Lukas*, I, Breslau 1892, p. 181.

<sup>124</sup>How careful one must be where the temporal succession of various events comes into question can be illustrated from Lk. 2, 39. This verse does not even faintly suggest that the visit of the Magi and the flight to Egypt took place before the Holy Family returned to Nazareth.

3. How, then, can we explain the inn and the crib? The first part of our answer to this question will consist in making clear the conditions in Bethlehem in those days. Bethlehem in the time of Our Lord was a little village. It was not likely that there was a large inn, a *pandocheion* with an innkeeper.<sup>125</sup> It is more in keeping with the smallness of the place, if we suppose that the village inn, the *katalumma* or khan, was a small house with one room only, set apart for such travellers as might come to a village as small as Bethlehem.<sup>126</sup> The crib seems to have served as an indication of where the shepherds should find the Divine Child. If so, it must have been a unique thing at a place well known to them. We meet with all these conditions, if we assume not a portable wooden crib, but one built of stones and clay, therefore fixed, and placed in the cave that served as a stable to the inn.<sup>127</sup> Caves used for similar purposes are numerous throughout Palestine.

We should, moreover, envisage Joseph's position upon his arrival at Bethlehem. He came there with the intention of settling down, but in the first place he had no house; this is clearly shown by the incident of the inn, in whatever way it may be explained. Judging from what commonly happens today in Palestine and Transjordan, Joseph was not at a loss as to what to do. He chose a cave, of which there is no lack near Bethlehem, and, with the help of Mary, adapted it into a dwelling place. His next need was work, because he was unemployed and, particularly after his marriage, had hardly anything he could draw upon. Let us bear in mind that in those days often enough it was as difficult to find work as it is today. Our Lord's parable of the laborers in the vineyard is a good example "Why stand you here all the day idle? Because no man hath hired us" (Mt. 20, 6-7). Moreover Joseph arrived, as we have seen, during a dead season, when little field-work was to be done, and such as there was of this kind of

<sup>125</sup>Lk. 10, 34-35.

<sup>126</sup>On this point see for instance A. Schlatter, *Das Evangelium des Lukas*, Stuttgart 1931, p. 95 (on Lk. 9, 12); F. W. Farrar, *The Gospel according to St. Luke (Cambridge Bible)*, Cambridge 1910, p. 66; also Lagrange, *Ev. selon s. Luc*, p. 72.

<sup>127</sup>A photographic reproduction, perhaps the only one ever made of a stable crib can be found in F. M. Willam, *Das Leben Marias der Mutter Jesu*, Freiburg 1936, opposite p. 160.

work, Joseph had to take on, until he could find a place in his own trade. No wonder, if he was not able for months, to settle down in a real house.

Taking these conditions as a basis, we may try to fit the inn and the crib into the events. At any rate, without pretending to give the single certain solution, we shall show that in our supposition it is quite easy to explain how Jesus was born in the stable of the village inn even if Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem five months before Our Lord's birth. When the Blessed Virgin felt her hour approaching, Joseph endeavoured to bring her to some more suitable place, so that the Divine Child should be given better accommodations than their own poorest conditions could afford. Mary took with her what she thought necessary for the occasion and accompanied Joseph when he went on his errand to some families of Bethlehem begging them to take his wife in for her hour. This was the most natural thing for Joseph to do, but obviously he failed. A last refuge was the village inn, but it turned out to be occupied and was therefore no suitable place for Mary. By now the hour had become most urgent. So they took to the cave nearby, which served as a stable to the inn. It was the very last place they would have thought of, worse than their own dwelling cave. It was only by sheer necessity that they entered there. But the place had at least one advantage, the manger served as a guide to the shepherds by which they found the Saviour. Naturally enough Joseph and Mary with her Child returned early the next morning to their own place. The next day if anybody of the Bethlehemites wished to see for himself what the shepherds had reported (Lk. 2, 18) or what rumours said, he found nobody in the cave. The birth of Christ remained a secret to the Bethlehemites.

This hypothesis can hardly be called impossible or even improbable. It certainly serves to show that the two events, the early arrival in Bethlehem, and the birth of Jesus in the stable-cave of the inn are reconcilable.

Summarizing the results of our study we can now, with a greater or lesser degree of certainty, arrange the events between

Mary's betrothal and Christ's birth in the following temporal sequence. Mary's betrothal very likely took place in the autumn, presumably in October, and its period was to last twelve months. When eight months had elapsed, Mary was visited by the Angel, and immediately became the mother of Jesus Christ. After a few days, required to arrange her journey, she paid a visit to her cousin Elisabeth, with whom she stayed till the birth of John the Baptist, somewhat over three months. It was the impending wedding that caused her to leave Elisabeth and to return to Nazareth. There she arrived again one or two weeks before her wedding day, and immediately sent word to Joseph concerning her condition. Joseph, greatly embarrassed for some days, received a message from Heaven to proceed in his preparations for the pre-arranged marriage. The marriage also took place in the autumn, say in October. Immediately afterwards Joseph gave up his abode in Nazareth, and went with Mary to Bethlehem to settle down there; the census-decree served him as a welcome occasion for the journey. He thus withdrew his wife from any control of the Nazarites and managed to keep the Incarnation a secret. About five months after they had come to Bethlehem, Jesus was born in the cave serving as a stable to the inn. These events, arranged according to our modern calendar-year, extended over three years or parts of them.

In the first year (about 9 B.C.)

Betrothal of Mary: In the autumn (October).

In the second year (8 B.C.)

Annunciation: in June-July

Journey to Elisabeth: after 8-14 days.

Sojourn with Elisabeth: somewhat over three months.

Return to Nazareth:	}	In quick succession in October-November.
Marriage feast:		
Journey to Bethlehem:		

In the third year (7 B.C.)

The Nativity of our Lord: about five months later,  
in March-April.