

Nativity

We are so used to the annual nativity story that we can forget why it is important. Throughout Britain there are literally thousands of nativity plays being performed. Is it just a children's story? What are the essential, salient, features of the story? How does the story surrounding Christ's birth relate to the incarnation? What is the purpose, the function, of the nativity story?

WHAT IS THE NATIVITY?

The word nativity (Middle English, from Old French, *nativite*,) is at its simplest, 'the occasion of a person's birth.' Specifically as *the* nativity it refers to the birth of Jesus Christ, the Christian festival of Christ's birth—Christmas—the nativity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Thousand upon thousand of school nativity plays and stories can begin to dull our senses to the importance of the nativity of incarnation of the Christ: God descending, dwelling with humanity, for humanity's redemption. Indeed good though they are, nativity plays and stories can trivialize, infantilize, and reduce the story to the appearance of a fiction.

These study notes are about a simple question. These notes are not meant to be comprehensive, but just to get you thinking, if you like 'theologically' about this question:

What were the conditions of the incarnation, how did the incarnation happen?

The broad general answer to this double questions is, 'the nativity'. The nativity is how it happened.

Questions—

What were the essential characteristics, the essential details, and what was not, what was extraneous?

Was there a crib?

Was it important that the shepherds visited?

Did the three Magi really visit?

How important are the details?

How did 'God become man'?

Ancient Pagan religions had all sorts of stories, myths, about 'gods' becoming human but these were power stories—'gods' that simply appeared as fully adult humans, wielding power, ravishing the young women, amassing huge amounts of gold, jewels and wealth to themselves, wasting whole armies with the sword, in many ways the opposite of what happened two thousand years ago in the nativity: God incarnated as a



vulnerable human baby, the same as us, 'God with us'. What place do we give to all the Old Testament prophecies—Isaiah, Malachi, Jeremiah, etc? What consideration do we give to the so-called 'Kenotic Hymn' in Philippians (kenosis, from Greek 'an emptying', in Christian theology the full or partial renunciation of his divine nature by Christ in the incarnation)

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'

Philippians 2:5-11



INCULTURATION

A key idea to understand is inculturation. This is what often happens when people talk about, write about, or create works of art reflecting, the nativity.

Inculturation is a term used in Christianity, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, referring to the adaptation of the way Church teachings are presented to non-Christian cultures, and to the influence of those cultures on the evolution of these teachings. In the case of the nativity this is often seen in stories or paintings where the culture of a contemporary society is used to represent the birth of Jesus and the cultural appearance of the nativity story: for example, Medieval paintings where the first century stable, manger, and Jewish characters are replaced with a Medieval castle, fine Medieval clothes, perhaps the patron of the painting kneeling in a corner, etc., and the three Magi (Astrologers) were changed into kings as a sign of respect to monarchy (you rarely get peasant shepherds in Medieval nativity scenes). Today the nativity may be represented in West Indian Caribbean cultural norms, or Chinese, or African ... or as modern American consumers in *The Simpsons*(!).

Central question to these study notes are—

What do these re-presentations tell you about the nativity?

What do these re-presentations tell you about the beliefs (and prejudices) of the person re-presenting the nativity?

What are the dangers in inculturation?

How valid are these re-presentations of the nativity in contemporary cultural norms?

Inculturation or Heresy ... ?



‘HOW WAS THE CHRIST BORN ?’

When news of the protesters encampment outside St Paul’s Cathedral was flooding the media, the Revd Canon Dr. Giles Fraser commented ‘I could image Jesus being born in the camp.’ This was tantamount to saying, Jesus would not have been born among the bankers the protestors were complaining about. In other words, ‘I identify with this group of people, ‘I like them, therefore Jesus would have been born among them; ‘I don’t like the other group of people, therefore Jesus would not have been one of them. The Christ would have been a reflection of Fraser’s political beliefs (one might even say, political prejudices). The conditions and features of the nativity, the circumstances of Christ’s birth, are changed to suit personal taste.

Seeing Jesus as ‘one of us’ is not new.

Giles Fraser’s comments generated correspondence in *The Church Times* (see opposite). What place does success and failure have in these comments? If we claim Jesus was one of us, is it acceptable if ‘we’ are oppressed and marginalized, but not acceptable if ‘we’ are successful, powerful, wealthy? What status do we give to the demonstrators illegal encampment? Is it anymore than a carnival sideshow that the authorities tolerate because it is fashionable and popular?

Seeing Jesus as ‘one of us’ is not new. Medieval art consistently

presented the nativity as a contemporary event peopled by white Europeans. But then African art likewise presents Jesus as a negro: Jesus as ‘one of us.’ Is there harm in this? Does it contradict something theologically fundamental?

This is not new (though it is not confined to white, liberal, left-wing political classes!). In 1937 the German artist Hermann Otto Hoyer, painted a picture entitled, *Am Anfang war das Wort* (*In The Beginning Was The Word*, John 1:1)—Jesus is not the Word of God, Adolf Hitler is presented as the Word of God (Saviour, Christ, Lord, God). The painting depicts the early days of National Socialism, Hitler as Lord—the Word of God—preaching to his converts (see below).

In the 1970s, inspired by Liberation Theology, Jesus was presented by Central American Roman Catholics (without Vatican approval) as a Marxist revolutionary. Like Nicaraguan peasants, Native North Americans in the 19th century were oppressed and saw a parallel with the sufferings of Jesus. But none of their leaders, as Hoyer did, claimed they were God incarnate.

Isaiah Shembe (d.1935) was the founder of the Zulu Nazareth Baptist Church and a figure in the African independent church movement in South Africa. Shembe, it is argued, created a new religion that sees Isaiah Shembe as ‘the manifestation of God.’ Was Shembe inspired by the Holy Spirit, and proclaimed as Christlike, as many saints are? Or did he consciously tip over a line and proclaim himself, supported by his followers, as God incarnate? Members of his Church, and his successors (his nephew and grandson) argue for both viewpoints: he was Christlike, but also, he was God re-incarnated.

Above: Apache Nativity - Virgin & Child
Left: Isaiah Shembe. c.1920
Far Left: An African Nativity

Hermann Otto Hoyer’s, *Am Anfang war das Wort* (*In The Beginning Was The Word*, John 1:1), 1937

Max Klinger, *Christ on Mount Olympus* (1897).



In 1897 Max Klinger painted a picture of Christ on Mount Olympus: Jesus as a pale-skinned, Caucasian (not a Jew), a tall blonde-haired, wise Germanic religious leader, conversing with young Greek men and women: Christ as a nineteenth century bourgeois liberal gentleman. This is a complete denial of Jesus's ethnicity as a Jew, and the importance of the Old Testament, the Hebrew tradition.

The Victorian establishment was not so crude as to commission paintings of a 'pink' Christ, a Victorian gentleman, but believed so, again often denying the Jewish nature of Jesus.

'CROSSING A LINE... ?'

What is happening here? Are these people looking into a mirror and seeing themselves as the Christ, projecting their own interests even their own prejudices onto Christ? There are numerous paintings of Jesus Christ in the tradition, culture and identity of a particular group of people: this is inculturation. This is seen as Jesus identifying with part of humanity, when *He* did come for all humanity. But often a line is crossed. How do we define that line? Isaiah Shembe (supported by his congregation) crossed that line in claiming to be the Christ, God re-incarnated, as did Herman Otto Hoyer's depiction of Hitler as the Word of God.

The Jesuit theologian George Tyrrel commented that in many cases such a Jesus 'is only the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well.' (George Tyrrel S.J., *Christianity at the Cross-Roads*, 1909, p. 49.) Do people simply see what they want to see when they deny the Church's God-given authority and its story of Jesus. Do these critics attempt to re-package Jesus to suit themselves? The Swiss theologian Karl Barth understood the danger of projecting our own expectations onto the Christ event. Barth commented that that God *always* contradicts our expectations; God says 'Yes' to our 'No', and 'No' to our 'Yes'. God will do with us what God wants, often riding over our petty concerns! Yet the nativity *is* Immanuel—'God with us'—but how we know about it and appropriate it, and what we do with it, is another matter.



Questions

- ◆ In proclaiming 'I could imagine Jesus being born in the camp' was Giles Fraser, despite his fashionably inclusive credentials, being exclusive?
- ◆ Is it ever justified to say Jesus is one of our group, only?
- ◆ If it is unacceptable for Hoyer to present Hitler as the Word of God, what criteria is acceptable?
- ◆ Are the truly excluded, the marginalized, ever visible or known to us?
- ◆ What do these inculturated interpretations of the nativity tell us about the incarnation?
- ◆ How important is Jesus's Jewishness and Hebrew heritage?

From Dr P. H. Brazier
 Sir, — Canon Giles Fraser has commented in the media (*The Guardian*, Friday 28 October) that demonstrators 'tented encampment alongside St Paul's Cathedral. He simply does not understand the theo-logic of the incarnation. There would have been "no room at the encampment" among the popular and fashionable demonstrators. A night-watchman at the Stock Exchange would have surreptitiously taken them in through the given birth in the basement among the transaction records of the capitalism, fat cats and greedy pigs sleeping safely.
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The Church Times, *Letters Page*, 4 November 2011

Piero della Francesca, *Nativity*, c.1415



The Gospel in the Art of the Peasants of Solentiname
 Carlos Garcia, 'Nativity', Luke, 2/7



From the Revd Martin Jewitt
 Sir, — Dr Paul Brazier (Letters, 4 November) may well be right that the parents of a present-day Jesus might have been "surreptitiously taken in through the back door" by "a night watchman at the Stock Exchange", while there was "no room at the encampment". But it could equally be the other way round. Jesus called Zealot terrorists to follow him, as well as tax collectors, who were even more unpopular than bankers today. He colluded in a political demonstration by a crowd seeking a Messiah to liberate them from the oppressive Romans. He told subversive stories encouraging the welcome of outcasts — in those days, the Gentiles and the poor. The incarnation means that Jesus identifies with all who know their spiritual need, be they financiers, church leaders, demonstrators, or beggars. I welcome the articles last week, by the Bishop of London and others, which direct St Paul's, and other churches in the City, to engage at all levels.
 MARTIN JEWITT
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The Church Times, *Letters Page*, 11 November 2011

Reportage or Myth?

SUSPICION

Modern Biblical studies is founded on a so-called 'hermeneutic of suspicion': scholars must be suspicious of everything they read, the assumption being that people writing 2,000 years ago were not as scientifically rigorous as we are, humanity has progressed(!).

According to a hermeneutic of suspicion, much of the nativity story is dismissed because it cannot be independently verified. A hermeneutic of suspicion is at the heart of the so-called 'Quest for the historical Jesus' initiated by Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) in an attempt to find the 'real' Jesus. This necessitated rejecting the Bible as a 'falsity' and the Church's witness as flawed. Lessing invented the concept of the contingency of history (he termed history a 'broad ugly ditch') so as to repudiate the Church's story of Jesus; however, for two centuries the followers of Lessing have ignored this contingency of history in attempting to proclaim their de-mythologized and 'secular' story of Jesus as the one true version, grounded in an over-inflated concept of reason, which Postmodernism has done away with.

SCEPTICISM

What happens if we apply a hermeneutic of suspicion to these Modern Liberal Bible scholars? The only safe approach to scholarship built on a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' is to subject such Bible scholars to the same sort of suspicion: what motivates them, why are they so afraid to believe? Why do they deny the authority of the Bible? How does sin affect their judgements, their blindness? The Church marginalizes and denies the Bible at its peril whether it is the late Medieval Roman Catholic Church who burned people alive at the stake for translating, printing, distributing, and reading it in their own language or today's liberal Anglicans who hide behind a hermeneutic of suspicion. Ask yourself why do they do this? What dark ulterior reasons motivate? Why do they seek to hide from God's wondrous and miraculous dealings with humanity?

WAS THERE A STAR?

For example, 'Modern'/'Liberal' Bible scholars following in Lessing's footsteps, are convinced the Star of Bethlehem was a myth, a fictional embellishment. Great Pagan leaders were said to be greeted by a star in the night sky at their birth, especially for them! This became a literary detail added to traditional Greek and Roman biography, therefore, the Star of Bethlehem was a myth because the stars for Greek and Roman leaders were myths. But what were the facts? In the year, by our reckoning, 4BC, there was a rare conjunction of Venus, Saturn and Jupiter so that the sun's light was reflected from all three creating an unbelievably bright point of light, a 'star', for a

while, prefaced by the movement of all three planets gradually into line, reflecting a brighter and brighter light as their orbits coincided. We know this because the movements of the planets can be scientifically predicted, back-tracked, from today's positions, using computer projections. So in this instance the Star of Bethlehem really was real, characterised by movement and by an intensely bright light perceived at its brightest, from the Eastern Mediterranean.

We have messed around, changed, reset, the calendar so many times over the last 2,000 years, that it may be that Jesus was born in what we call '4BC' rather than 0BC/AD'. Only now can we accurately measure the solar year in relation to the planets and the sun.

MYTH BECAME FACT

In Pagan myths there are stories of a 'god' descending to earth to save humanity, and of dying and resurrected 'gods', these were myths. C.S. Lewis refused to dismiss them as nonsense or devil-inspired as some Calvinists argued, or as some anthropologists and scientists claimed, that all religious was a psychological response to a hostile and frighteningly world. No, said Lewis, these are God giving intimations into people's minds, through the imagination, of what would really happen one day. These myths 'pre-figure'. The same is apparently true with the patronisingly obsequious stories of stars forming to greet a Pagan Roman Emperor's birth: humanity missed the point of these stories. The exceedingly rare conjunction, briefly, of the two gas giants (Saturn and Jupiter) and Venus to concentrate the sun's light happened around the time of Jesus's birth—or just after—also witnessed to in Scripture. Of course if you want to stay with modern scepticism do so—claim it was a meaningless coincidence, or that the sky was cloudy and they didn't see it, or the sun went out for the night, or bury your head in the sand...!



WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF THE NATIVITY?

That God is incarnated human for our salvation ... but how. God doesn't just appear as an adult human as many ancient myths predicted. God is fully human and fully divine. Conceived by the Holy Spirit—a form of Parthenogenesis (reproduction from an ovum without fertilization). But what of all the details of the nativity story?

Overleaf you will find an alternative nativity—a delayed nativity. God can only be incarnated once, within our reality, multiple incarnations are not possible or necessary—unless you reduce Jesus to an ordinary human being with a super-religious ego(!). God incarnated only happens once in our reality. In this story Christ was not born 2000 years ago, history was different. Here Christ is born today, nearly 2000 years after the Romans had conquered Britain (in 43AD). Here the Roman Empire still has not conquered the Barbarians—the Scots, the Germanic Nation, the Vikings, Norse, and the Slav peoples (Russia today), though the Roman Empire now stretches to encompass all of Africa, and here it was the Romans who discovered the Americas. Israel and Jerusalem were razed as a result of rebellion 1900 years ago, all Jews are in the diaspora. Mary and Joseph live in Londinium, working as an office cleaner and a builders chippie (carpenter). Technology still developed—cars, hi-rise gleaming corporate buildings, but no aircraft and no railways: the network of Roman roads simply led eventually to powered vehicles—steam engines, then the internal combustion engine. Computers, yes, but an internet closely guarded and controlled by the Roman establishment. And apartheid between Roman citizens and untouchables, including Jews, who wear a tattooed Star of David on their forehead. What is accurate about this story, or not, what is non-essential?

USING THIS DELAYED NATIVITY AS A STARTING POINT, READ THE NEW TESTAMENT ACCOUNTS (MATTHEW, LUKE, JOHN 1, PHILLIPIANS 2, ETC.) OF THE NATIVITY. LIST BELOW WHAT FEATURES ARE ESSENTIAL TO THE NATIVITY—AND WHAT FEATURES ARE NON ESSENTIAL!

ESSENTIAL FEATURES

NON-ESSENTIAL FEATURES

A Delayed Nativity ...

The days were short, darkness fell all too soon. As the rain turned to sleet and the biting wind cut through the rags wrapped around the women, many of them with infants strapped to their backs, the tradesman's entrance was finally opened for them. They went in, gathered their buckets and mops, dusters and polish, empty black plastic bags for rubbish, ready to start the night's work.

Mary knew her time was near, but like the other women, the untouchables, she had to keep working. Later, Joseph had finished his night-shift on the building site so he came to meet her. He waited outside the corporate concrete, steel and plate glass building till she appeared. Clearly things were not right; she was beginning to go into labour. But where could they go. The office block she cleaned, with nearly two dozen other women, was next door to the Temple of Diana. This massive temple had stood for hundreds of years, on the site of successive Roman temples. Dedicated to the goddess Diana, and in alignment with the Temple of Apollo in Westminster, the Temple of Diana was atop of Ludgate Hill, in the City of Londinium.

Joseph shepherded Mary with all the care he could muster over to the demonstration outside and to the side of the Temple of Diana. All of the demonstrators were Roman citizens—no one else would have been allowed to demonstrate — indeed, two weeks earlier, a Jewish preacher (recognized by the Star of David tattooed, by law, on his forehead) had actually stood on the steps of the temple and read aloud from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. He preached that one was coming after him whose sandal latch he was not worthy to undo, he that was to come would baptize them with water and with fire! This prophet was known, and mocked with amusement, but now, on the steps of the goddesses' temple! Members of the Praetorian elite



rushed him, hacked him down immediately with their traditional short Roman swords, then shot him in the head. The demonstrators—demanding changes to the land ownership conditions, and the rights to personal wealth, for Roman citizens suffering a heavy tax burden, had been interrogated to know if they had supported this Jew-prophet. The city of Londinium was one massive building site—in preparation, barely thirty years away, for the two thousandths anniversary of the final conquest and subjugation of Britannia, under Emperor Claudius. Two triumphal arches were under construction at each side of Ludgate Hill, one in remembrance of the Emperor 'god' Claudius, the other for his general, Aulus Plautius.

Joseph and Mary asked the demonstrators for shelter, could they take them in, Mary was now in labour. But they refused, leastwise, a small group who often dominated the debate refused them entry into the tented encampment, precisely because of what had happened to the prophet, whose blood still stained the steps of Diana's Temple. No untouchables were allowed into the demonstrators encampment, certainly no Jews—by law, by decree!

A middle-aged man, immaculately dressed, wearing an expensive suit, his sallow complexion giving him away as a Greek, his clothes and manner that of a financier, a banker, hated by the demonstrators, this man sidled up to them, surreptitiously whispering to them, *'Come. Now. Quick, I can give you shelter.'* They walked round behind the demonstrator's encampment, to the rear of a tall stainless steel building. *'No!'*, said Joseph, *'No, we can't go in there!'* It was the exchange. All Roman banking and financial transactions focused onto this one building. All transactions were scrutinized, approved, or rejected, for the whole of Britannia. This delayed matters

... What If ?

Therefore
the Lord himself
shall give you a sign;
Behold, a virgin
shall conceive,
and bear a son,
and shall call his name
Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:14

financial—this was one of the complaints by the demonstrators, the state control of the market, the state subsidy of the market (though the luxury that they could demonstrate, being Roman citizens, while others would have been executed, was lost on them). Nicolaides the Greek reassured them. He worked in the Exchange, a city trader and banker, he could get them into the basement through a small rear door: *'You must come, look, your wife is about to drop!'* So as clandestinely as possible, they entered the tiny rear door, descending three flights of stairs, Nicolaides unlocking and entering a door into a store room, spreading out sacks and computer printout papers for Mary to lie down on. She insisted on turning, kneel on all fours, as the labour pains gripped her. *'Don't worry'*, said Nicolaides reassuringly, *'No one can hear us down hear.'*

Mary's screams were loud; but no one came. Eventually, as Joseph held her, she gave birth. It was quick, as was expected for a 16-year-old, the long hours of physical work, cleaning, helping. And she brought forth a son, her first born, and named him Jesus, as the Angel Gabriel had commanded when, nine months earlier, he had visited her on the tented encampment, the Jewish ghetto, around the banks of the River Lea, East of Londinium. The puzzlement at this virginal conception from God being matched by Joseph's initial rejection of her, till her prayers were answered and Gabriel had visited Joseph.

'Sshh!' ordered Nicolaides. There were clearly sounds coming from the stair well. The door opened gradually. A voice called out in a whisper, *'Here, they're here.'* A tall elderly West Indian Jewish women came in followed by some eight others, all

cleaners. *'I knew it, I knew it! The dream, my vision was too clear, too real, I knew the saviour, the Christ, was to be born tonight, I knew we were to come here!'* In they came. They offered gifts, an old anorak to wrap around the babe, a bar of chocolate—for Mary! Mary rested; while the cleaners worshipped the babe. *'It is thousands of years since the prophets spoke, but they are never wrong, nor the angel in your vision'*, a young cleaner commented, no more than a girl herself, *'We are saved! Lord, now we can go in peace, your Word has been fulfilled.'*

Nicolaides the Greek came back, he had been scouting around: *'You must go. There are Praetorians in the upper floors of the building and around the precinct. They must suspect something. Come, we must all go. The Governor fears the old prophecies, and he has informers!'* The women cleaners helped Mary up, petting the babe! They all followed Nicolaides lead. Everything went smoothly until they exited the building, but as they rounded the corner next to the encampment they ran into two Praetorians. Joseph stood between them and Mary. He was hacked down immediately, then a Taser thrust into his mouth to fry his brain with 2000 volts. The women gathered around Mary wailing and pleading, throwing themselves at her feet and the feet of the Praetorians, thereby impeding their thrust at Mary. Nicolaides spoke hastily to the demonstrators at the rear of the encampment—*'You owe me! Now, give us a distraction, I have to get the young woman away with her baby! Come, you owe me!'* Nicolaides, among others, was the focus of the demonstrator's hatred, but he had helped them, had secretly supported them. For a few seconds they paused, thought, but knew



they had to respond. They hurled rubbish, sleeping bags, pots and pans at the Praetorians, more of whom had arrived. Amidst the melee Nicolaides slipped his arm round Mary, ushered her away as she looked back at Joseph's slaughtered body. The distraction had worked, but many of the cleaners, with infants carried on their backs paid the price. The infants were ripped off them and speared, slashed, cut-through there and then, many of the women being shot through the Star of David tattoo on their forehead. The demonstrators, being Roman citizens, were chided by the Praetorians, but left alone to continue with their illegal, but fashionable, demonstration. Initially they had rejected Mary, yet they had then saved the Christ!

Nicolaides helped Mary and the baby Jesus into the boot of his limousine—apologising profusely that it had to be so. Being a Greek financier and a Roman citizen, he was waved through all checkpoints. At his house in North Londinium Mary washed, changed, fed Jesus, then climbed into the rear facing seat behind the grill in Nicolaides other vehicle (a large utility estate car, the fore part was for him, and his ilk; any untouchables, were behind the grill. Now he could transport her as a servant without questions being asked. They drove all the next day and night, along the Ermine Way to Eboracum York, then on along Dere Way to Coria stopping to eat, and for Mary to 'change' Jesus. Even when they reached the frontier post at the recently re-built Hadrian's Wall (now a 60 foot high steel and concrete barrier) Nicolaides' credentials saw them through—they were clear of Rome! Now in Caledonia (the land of the Scots and Picts—outside of the Roman Empire), he had friends who could get them onto a fishing boat, then to the Faroe Islands where finally they could stop and rest. Nicolaides the Greek had been born in Alexandria, an ancient Greek community on the Egyptian coast, as such he knew the Hebrew Scriptures, but did not fully understand them, or the prophecy regarding the Christ. But he had grown up with Greek Jews, knew the story, trusted Mary implicitly, and knew in his heart this was right.

After resting up on the Faroe Islands they shipped across to the Scania Lands. Here, they were visited by three Sages, Norse Shamans who knew who and what Mary's child was. They had studied all the Scriptures, they had observed the stars, the planetary movements,

which confirmed the stories they knew from their own tradition, the stories of God being incarnated to save humanity. Moving on, never settling in any one place for any length of time, ever moving, Nicolaides cared for Mary—now outside of Roman jurisdiction—giving her the status of a senior housekeeper. International Roman banking allowed him to fund their travels. On Mary's advice, they moved after several years, through the lands of the Slavs—Mary must get Jesus to the Eastern Mediterranean. Nicolaides knew this was the riskiest part of the venture. What used to be the ancient Kingdom of Israel had been a waste land for nineteen hundred years: a no-go-area, devoid of civilization, just nomadic tribes, some Jewish, and the ruins of Jerusalem, and other cities. While they resided in a large town in the Ural Mountains, Jesus was taken to a synagogue, and presented to the elders. Jesus grew strong, and knew the Scriptures, waiting for the day he could arrive in Palestine.

Nicolaides—who was not a young man—grew ill, contracting tuberculosis and died. His wealth could not be left to Mary. Under Slav law Jews were not untouchables, but they were not citizens. Mary was on her own again. Now, as a working domestic, she had to make her way with Jesus south out of the Land of the Slav and eventually into Babylonia, attaching herself to a nomadic caravan as a servant, Jesus apprenticed as a tent maker and repairer. Finally, she arrived into the wasteland that was the former Israel.

Back in Londinium the Roman Empire celebrated the two thousandth anniversary of the conquest of Britannia. Thousands of miles away, Jesus being nearly 30 years of age, was ready to embark on his ministry and mission, his blood shed for Israel's redemption and the atonement of humanity.

