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In each of my books, I always write acknowledgments as a way of expressing my thankfulness to those who contributed in some way to what I have written.

In this book, I begin my acknowledgments by thanking my parents, Ronald and Erlita Renner, for rearing me to love Jesus, the Bible, and the Church — and for making Christmas a special event in our family when we were children. Today my parents have preceded us to Heaven, but they instilled such a deep love for Christmas in my young heart as a child. Much of this book comes from my fascination with the Christmas story they taught me.

I also express my appreciation to my wife Denise; our sons Paul, Philip, and Joel; our daughters-in-law Polina, Ella, and Olya; and our grandchildren William, Anya, Cohen, Abby, Mia, Mika, Daniel, and Mark. In the Renner household, it is our family tradition at Christmastime to read the Christmas story before any gift is opened. Our family has come to anticipate this precious moment when we sit together with our Bibles opened and each take turns reading parts of the story and sharing what is special to us about this miraculous event. If you have no such family tradition, I pray this book will become an instrument you can use to share this marvelous story with members of your own family.

I knew this book needed to be beautifully illustrated, so I prayed for God to lead me to the right illustrator. He led me to Lev Kaplan, a Russian-Jew from the former Soviet Union, who has illustrated many books for authors. I am thankful to Lev for his historically accurate illustrations, and I am sure readers will reap the benefits of his work as the art captured in this book helps them “see” the story come to life before their eyes.

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INTRODUCTION

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Each year at Christmastime when I was growing up, my parents loaded my sisters and me into the car, and we drove to one of many Christmas tree lots located in our city. We walked studiously up and down rows of *cypress*, *pine*, and *fir* in painstaking search for a tree that was just perfect for our family.

Once we chose a tree, Dad purchased it, tied it to the top of our car, drove it home, and set it in our living room. My sisters and I were giddy with delight as we all decorated it with silver tinsel, large colorful lights, strings of popcorn, and Christmas bulbs of all sorts. Then we topped it off by placing a red-and-silver aluminum lighted star on the very peak. Doing this every year was a major joyful event in the Renner household!

Afterward, I'd sit and look at the lights and decorations literally for hours at a time. So to keep my focus fixed on Christ and not fixated on the Christmas tree, my mother came up with a brilliant idea. She encouraged me each year to make a manger scene out of construction paper.

Cooperative and eager, first, I'd pull out my big box of crayons and colorfully sketch a little barn — filled with animals, shepherds, wise men, Joseph, Mary, *Jesus*, and an angel sitting on top of the roof of the barn. Then using my craft scissors, I would carefully cut out my drawing. Right where hoped-for gifts would eventually sit under the tree, I'd then place my Christmas-story scene, using clean ice-cream sticks and glue to support it, upright under the tree.

For me, this became the most important element of our Christmas tree. Instead of focusing on the bulbs and the lights, I'd lie on my stomach in front of the tree and gaze upon my work of art that displayed the scene of that miraculous night when Jesus was born.

By encouraging me to do this, my mother purposely helped me to keep the right focus at Christmastime and not to dwell on Christmas-tree

ornaments or gifts. With her guidance, Jesus' birth — and the characters and scenes surrounding His birth — became the “center” for my little heart and imagination, and the tree with all the other “trimmings and trappings” of Christmas became secondary. My focus shifted to the construction-paper scene that sat right under the Renner Christmas tree, where I could lie on the floor and imagine what Jesus' grand entrance into the world must have been like.

Also each year at Christmastime, our church had a special service to celebrate the season. At that special Christmas service, our pastor's wife played Christmas carols on an antique pump organ that had been assembled in the middle of our church platform for such occasion. She played that old organ while our pastor led the church in singing Christmas carols.

These songs always preceded the distribution of “giant,” 12-by-1-inch candy canes to every young person in the church — a treat we never took for granted, but awaited with great anticipation as we sang those Christmas songs with all our hearts. Then our pastor would preach marvelously about the birth of Jesus — *the real reason for Christmas* — and give an altar call for people to come forward to surrender their lives to the Savior. Each year we would see a generous number of people walk the aisles to make that eternal decision.

Only after that were the candy canes distributed. We weren't allowed to open them in church, but as soon as the service was over and we were outside the building, we all raced to peel off the plastic covering on that striped candy to take our first lick! Those candy canes were a big deal to the kids in the pews — but in truth, it was “bait” to attract lots of unsaved people to that service to hear the Good News of Jesus.

That particular service was always held on a Sunday night, and I can remember all the pews being packed with young children, youth, and their parents. Later, after the service was over, our family always went to a friend's home that was filled to overflowing with our closest friends, and we stayed there until midnight, celebrating together.

On Christmas Eve, we Renner kids would get ready for bed, donning our pajamas and crawling under our covers in ecstatic anticipation of the big morning that simply couldn't come soon enough.

As the morning sunlight peeked through our bedroom curtains on Christmas Day, my sisters and I would awaken to the sounds of Mother bustling about in the kitchen. Excitedly, we'd race down the hallway to the living room, where Daddy was always poised with his Brownie 8mm camera, ready to capture our expressions as Christmas-morning festivities quickly began. We squinted as we looked into the glaring camera lights that shone so brightly in our faces. My Daddy documented our every move with that camera — and we have those precious memories to enjoy today, which are still so endearing to me!

In the earliest years, when my sisters and I were especially young, Daddy took time on Christmas morning to read the Christmas story to our family. He'd sit in his recliner in the corner of the living room near the tree, and he'd call for Mother, Ronda, Lori, and I to gather around as he opened his *King James* Bible to the familiar Christmas passage in Luke chapter 2. If we were really attentive and Dad thought he still had our attention, he would take extra time to turn to Matthew's account of the three wise men who came to worship Jesus as a young child. *I especially loved it when he told us the story of the three wise men!*

The impact my father made on me by following this practice during my childhood never left me. I pledged that when I became a father, my own family would read the Christmas story before a single gift was opened. Years later, when Denise and I began our family, we made a decision that we would follow this tradition and open no gifts on Christmas morning until we had *first* read the Christmas story in its entirety to our children Paul, Philip, and Joel. Although our sons were eager to open gifts, they understood the tradition — and that tradition meant we were going to place God's Word *first* before opening gifts. Jesus is God's Gift to the world — truly the greatest Gift ever given to mankind. Without Him, all other giving falls short, even with the short-term happiness it can bring.

Knowing that the reading of the Christmas story was the plan, and that nothing was going to alter it, actually *helped* our children listen attentively. Not only did we carefully read the Christmas story to them, we also involved them in the conversation. Sometimes we devoted *a full hour* to this discussion before we even moved toward the Christmas tree. The Word

of God — and reading as a family about the *real* reason for Christmas — reigned supreme above everything else.

And guess what? As we discussed Mary, Joseph, the angels, the shepherds, Herod, the wise men, the guiding star, and so forth, this very real Bible story became a favorite highlight of Christmas and a cherished memory for our sons.

Each year as I'd read from the Bible, I'd ask our sons questions, and the boys would raise their hands, eager to give the answers they'd come to know so well. It became like a holiday game. As result, our sons became soundly educated in the Christmas story and the many interesting facts surrounding this momentous event that even most adults don't know.

Now our sons are adults with their own children, and Denise and I have allowed our sons to take the prominent role in reading the Christmas story in our home as a large, expanded family. Even today, no one among our 16-member family would *think* to violate this holy family tradition. *How could we open gifts before putting God's Word first?* To put Him first and continue this handed-down custom is the most wonderful part of our Christmas experience.

Decades have passed since we decided to make this a family tradition, and today we are still reading the Christmas story as a family *before* we open gifts. Every Christmas, our immediate family members come to our home, where all the grandchildren excitedly wait to open their presents. But just as our sons had to wait until the Christmas story was first read and discussed, we continue this family tradition — now a favorite memory among a new generation of Renners.

We read the Christmas story from Luke and Matthew, and then our grandchildren interact, joining the conversation about what we just read about the birth of Jesus. As questions are asked, they eagerly lift their hands to be acknowledged, and they each participate in a wonderful discussion about Jesus and all the events that surrounded His miraculous birth. One hand shoots up into the air — *then the next and the next* as our grandchildren compete to give the right answers to questions, such as:

- How old was Mary when she became pregnant?
- How did she become pregnant?
- What was the job of a carpenter?
- Was Joseph poor or rich?
- Where did the Magi come from?
- Why was Herod so troubled by Jesus' birth?
- Who were the Magi?
- What did they really bring to Jesus in honor of Him?

This family tradition has become so important to all of us that no one gets in a hurry to move on to the time of opening gifts. The children realize that the gifts will still be there regardless of how much time our story takes. We have so much fun talking about the Gospel message that no one ever becomes anxious about the rest of the day's events. The big event of our Christmas morning is *the story of Christmas* and the fun experience of answering questions correctly concerning this holy event and hearing what others have to contribute of *their* understanding of this historical moment in time.

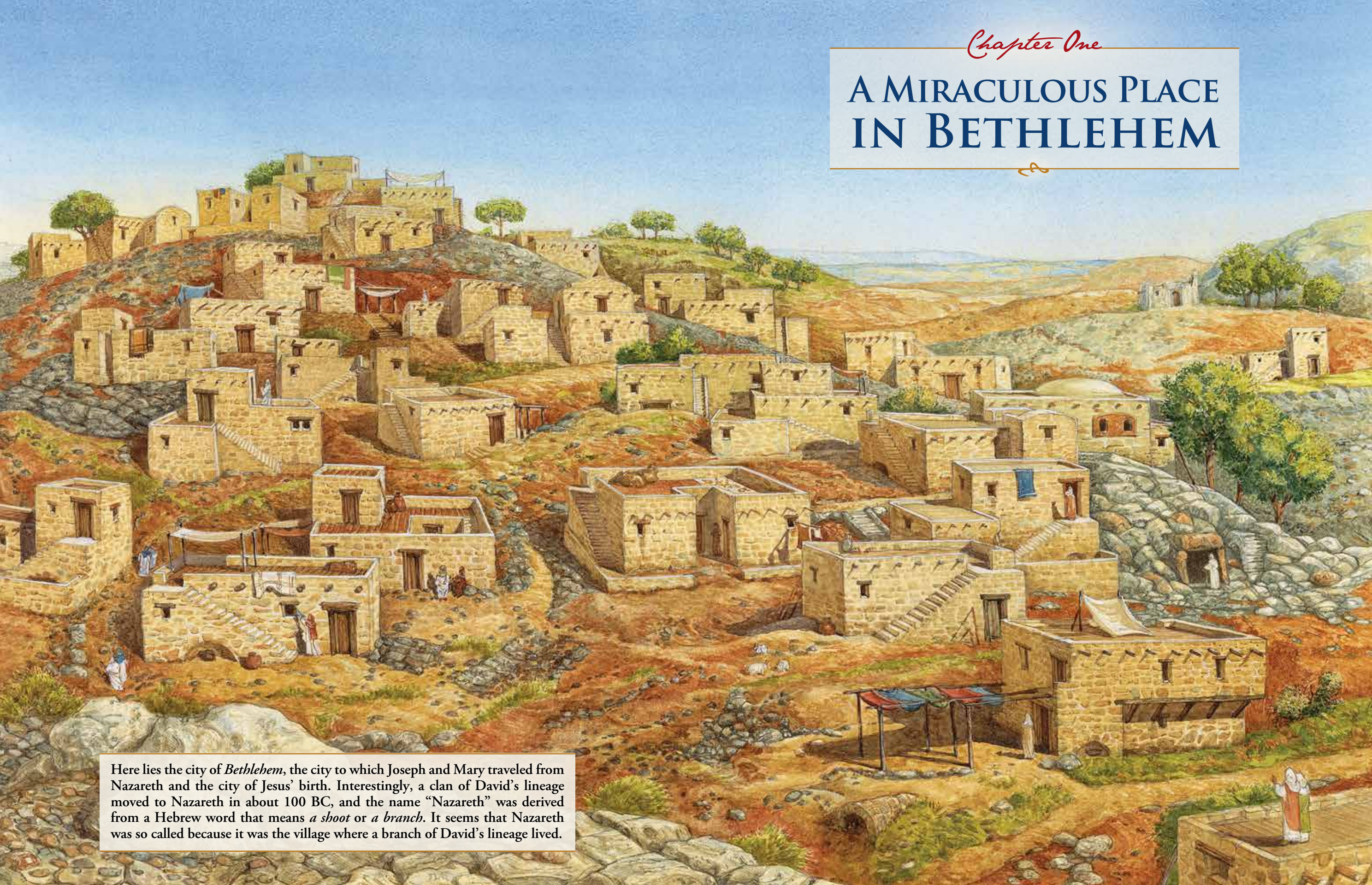
Christmas Day is a wonderful day to speak truth to your children or grandchildren about Jesus — and to make the Word of God the highest priority of the day that they will likely model in every area of their lives *for the rest of their lives*. The impact and the memories will last a lifetime as you make it a fun and meaningful time together — and then move on to opening presents, partaking of special foods, and enjoying precious time with family for the rest of the day.

The reason I wrote this book is to help you share this never-ending miraculous story with your family, loved ones, and friends. If you have younger children or grandchildren, I urge you to make the telling of the Christmas story the main theme of your day. It won't hurt the kids to wait a few more minutes before they dive into the gifts. And telling this story will not only remind them what this day is all about, but will remain with them in their hearts forever.

Can you think of any better gift to give to others on Christmas Day?

Chapter One

A MIRACULOUS PLACE IN BETHLEHEM



Here lies the city of *Bethlehem*, the city to which Joseph and Mary traveled from Nazareth and the city of Jesus' birth. Interestingly, a clan of David's lineage moved to Nazareth in about 100 BC, and the name "Nazareth" was derived from a Hebrew word that means *a shoot* or *a branch*. It seems that Nazareth was so called because it was the village where a branch of David's lineage lived.



In the hills surrounding Bethlehem today, there are many caves that were once used as stables and barns for the livestock of locals and of travelers passing through. Inside those caves, holes had been bored at various intervals along the dense stone walls as a means of hitching or tying up an animal. Below those hitching posts were troughs, also carved right into the walls, for feeding and watering the livestock or cattle.

One such cave in Bethlehem, rudimentary and undistinguished in appearance from other similar caves, was the place where something miraculous occurred that changed the course of human history. A baby was born there to a traveler who had arrived from Nazareth with her husband — the couple finding no other lodging in this small town that has been named in songs, storybooks, and biblical accounts for more than 2,000 years.

That baby, of course, was a king — born in a cave, wrapped lovingly by his mother with strips of cloth, and laid carefully inside a trough for animals, *also known as a manger...*

Of course, His name was *Jesus* — eternal King of kings and Lord of lords — and He came to the earth as the Christ Child and the Savior of mankind. Most celebrate His birth today during the time of year we know as Christmas, but it is a miraculous story that should be celebrated every day of the year. This book opens up the biblical narrative to accurately give you not just the story of Christmas, but “the *rest* of the story” that you may have never heard.

Today in Bethlehem, there is an ancient church called the Church of the Nativity, which is an important site that attracts millions of

visitors from all over the world. The church was built on the site where Jesus was born and placed into His historical manger — and where the shepherds came to worship Him, as recorded in the gospel of Luke.

Most people imagine that Jesus was born in a wooden stable because that is the image most frequently illustrated on Christmas cards and in other media. But in addition to the marvelous narrative of the birth of Christ that we read about in the gospel of Luke, there were also early Christian leaders who wrote that Christ was born in a “cave” in Bethlehem.

The earliest-known record of Jesus’ birth in a cave was written in 150 AD by the illustrious Christian apologist Justin Martyr. Martyr was born and reared only about 30 miles from Bethlehem, so what he wrote about Christ’s birthplace is especially important.

As a native of that region, Justin Martyr was familiar with local lore, and having heard those local stories of Christ’s birth as he was growing up, he penned what had been locally reported about the Savior’s birth in Bethlehem:

“...When the Child [Christ] was born in Bethlehem, since Joseph could not find a lodging in that village, he took up his quarters in a certain cave near the village; and while they were there Mary brought forth the Christ and placed Him in a manger....”¹

But in addition to Justin Martyr, there were other significant early voices who also credited a cave in Bethlehem as the location where Christ was born. In 248 AD, the theologian Origen wrote:

“...There is shown at Bethlehem the cave where He [Christ] was born, and the manger in the cave where He was wrapped in





swaddling-clothes. And this sight is greatly talked of in surrounding places....”²

According to Origen, many Christians were still aware of the cave and visited it often at the time he wrote about it. In fact, Origen states the cave was still “greatly talked of” and that the manger where Christ was laid in swaddling clothes was still visible in the cave. It would be hard to imagine that the manger would still be visible at that time if it had been fashioned of wood as most people think.

But the manger that Luke writes about (*see* Luke 2:12) was *not* made of wood as most people imagine and as Christmas cards depict. In caves that were used as stables and barns, mangers were hollowed-out spaces carved from the cave itself, which means the manger was made of stone,³ not wood. That explains why it was possible for visitors to still see it at the time Origen wrote about it in 248 AD.

Indeed, in the hills that surround Bethlehem, there are *many* shallow caves that were once used as stables and barns at exactly the time Jesus was born. These formations were ideal places to keep animals, so wooden stables and barns would not have been needed. Shepherds used these caves as a shelter for both themselves and their sheep.⁴

Josephus, who was the most renowned Jewish historian — and noted by many as the most accurate — wrote about the caves scattered in the hills around Bethlehem.⁵ It is also a widely held fact that when travelers could not find a room in an inn (which was usually the second floor of a private home), they often retreated to one of these caves as a warm, dry place to stay.⁶

There were times when these caves in the area of Bethlehem were *filled* with animals and travelers who sought such a place to stay overnight. I have personally been inside many of these caves, and it is

not hard to imagine how they were used as stables and barns and, if needed, as a safe place of lodging for travelers.

After Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, converted to Christ from paganism in approximately 312 AD, she visited the Holy Land and spent two entire years interviewing people who knew all the sites pertinent to the life and ministry of Jesus.⁷ Because she desired to identify and preserve these biblical sites, she interviewed the great-great-grandchildren of many people whose predecessors lived at the time of Christ and who knew where all the important sites were located. Of course, one of the sites identified was the cave where He was born, which was still so revered by Christians at that time.⁸

After the cave was authenticated as the place of Christ’s birth, Helena’s son, Emperor Constantine, issued a decree for the first church building to be constructed on that site in the year 326 AD.⁹ That earliest church in Bethlehem was built directly on the land above the cave where Christ was born, and in 339 AD, the Church of the Nativity of Christ was dedicated.¹⁰

But many years later, Emperor Justinian gave a subsequent order for a more fabulous church to be built at the site.¹¹ The Church of the Nativity has been visited since the Sixth Century AD by millions of Christians. The cave directly beneath the floor of the church, where Christ was born, is the oldest site in the history of Christianity to be continuously used as a place of worship.

Today in Bethlehem, at the Church of the Nativity, you can still see the miraculous place where this “greatest story ever told” began. People travel from all over the world to visit this site. When a person visits this highly embellished church in Bethlehem today, it can be difficult to





imagine that this is the setting where Christ was born, because over the millennia it has been ornately and religiously decorated.

But deep below all those religious adornments and marble and granite floors of the highly ornamented church really is the cave where Mary delivered the Christ Child approximately 2,000 years ago. In that cave, a young virgin who was espoused to a young man named Joseph, miraculously gave birth to Jesus Christ.



What Do We Know About the Holy Family?

In addition to what we are told in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John about Mary and Joseph, we have access to additional information about the entire holy family that was recorded by early Christian leaders. Some of what those leaders recorded is repeated so frequently that we can be fairly confident about the accuracy of what they wrote.

Think about it. No story in history was more significant than the miraculous birth of Christ. Because people were so taken by the miracle of it all, a treasure trove of information about His birth and about the entire holy family was recorded in various early documents. By looking at the Scriptures and by also seeing what was written in those other early documents, the whole story becomes clear.

However, based on Scripture alone, we know a lot about the holy family. For example, we know the names of Jesus' grandfathers. *Did you ever think about the fact that Jesus had grandparents whom He visited while He was growing up?* On Joseph's side of the family, Jesus' grandfather was named Jacob (see Matthew 1:16), and on Mary's side of the family, His grandfather was named Joachim.

The New Testament also provides the names of some of Jesus' relatives. For example, two relatives of Jesus are mentioned in Luke 1:5-25, who were named Zacharias and Elizabeth (Elisabeth). In their elder years, Zacharias and Elizabeth gave birth to a son whom they named John. Their son John later came to be known as *John the Baptist*.

You may not have realized it before, but Jesus and John the Baptist were cousins. As cousins, it is very likely that Jesus and John spent time playing together as they were growing up since they had known each other from childhood.

In Matthew 13:55 and 56, we read that after Mary gave birth to Jesus (He was Mary's firstborn), she gave birth to *four more boys* and to at least *two girls*. That means Jesus was the eldest of at least six siblings. Matthew 13:55 says about Jesus, "Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses [Joseph], and Simon, and Jude?"

The boys born after Jesus were *James, Joseph, Simon, and Jude*. The Bible doesn't give us the names of His sisters, but Matthew 13:56 says, "And his sisters, are they not all with us?" The word "sisters" is plural in the Greek, so this lets us know that Jesus had *at least* two sisters in the family.



God Calls Families

The son that was born to Mary and Joseph after Jesus was named *James*. It's hard to imagine it, but John 7:5 tells us, "For neither did his brethren believe in him." In fact, Jesus' brothers did not believe Him to be the Messiah until after Jesus' resurrection.





First Corinthians 15:7 informs us that Jesus appeared to James after His resurrection, and that is when James finally understood that his older brother was God in the flesh. James became a believer and, in time, he eventually emerged as the principal leader of the church in Jerusalem. James even wrote a book of the New Testament that bears his name, the book of *James* (see James 1:1).

But surprisingly, Jesus had another brother who also wrote a book of the New Testament. His sibling Jude, who seems to be the *fourth* son in the family of Joseph and Mary, also became a strong believer after Jesus' resurrection. Like his elder brother James, Jude emerged as a Christian leader, and he also authored a book of the New Testament that bears his name, the book of *Jude* (see Jude 1).

Imagine that. In this remarkable family was the Virgin Mary, the Messiah, two sons (James and Jude) who wrote books of the New Testament, and other early sources say other sons and daughters in the family were also involved in ministry. The family of Joseph and Mary is an example of how God calls *entire families* and gives them a special family purpose.

God has been extending His call to entire families since the beginning of time, so it should not surprise us that God gave the entire family of Joseph and Mary a special assignment. God has always been in the habit of calling entire families, and He wants to call *your* family and give them a special purpose too.

In the Old Testament, we see:

- Noah, his wife, and their three sons and their wives were all called to fulfill God's plans.
- Abraham, Sarah, and their entire lineage were called.

- Isaac and Rebekah were selected by God to bring His will to the earth.
- Jacob and his 12 sons all played a part in God's purposes.
- Likewise, Moses, his brother Aaron, and their sister Miriam were called.


When we come to the New Testament, we see the pattern continues of God extending His call to entire families. For example:

- Mary and Joseph and all their children were called.
- Zachariah, Elizabeth, and their son John the Baptist were called.
- James and John, "the sons of Zebedee," were called.
- Peter and Andrew, two brothers, were called.
- Even the apostle Paul had multiple family members who were called. As he closed his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote, "Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow-prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me" (see Romans 16:7).

The Greek word for "kinsmen" means Andronicus and Junia were relatives of Paul. And notice Paul said they were "of note among the apostles." The fact that these two were relatives of Paul means there were two more of his family members in the ministry.

- Barnabas is another example of God extending His call to multiple members in one family. Barnabas was called to be a prophet and a teacher (see Acts 13:1,2), but his sister named Mary owned a very large house in Jerusalem with





a huge room on the second or third floor, and her living room is where the Day of Pentecost took place.

But that's not all. This other woman named Mary had a son whose name was John Mark. It was this John Mark who assisted Peter in his gospel writings, which is why one of the four gospels is referred to as the gospel of Mark.

In this one single family, we find that three family members — Barnabas, Mary, and John Mark — were all called.

Your heart may say, *Oh, how I want this to happen with my family. How can God's call be extended to my entire family?* It begins with *one person* who has an encounter with God and surrenders his or her life to Him. It can begin with *you*.

In Noah's case, he was the first one in his family who heard God's call, but his decision to follow the Lord obediently in response to that call affected his whole family and brought salvation to all of them. How about Abraham? He is another example of how it all begins with one person. God only spoke to Abraham at first, but because he listened and responded to God's invitation, Abraham's decision affected his wife Sarah, their son Isaac, and their whole lineage.

The call of God to families all begins with one person. If your heart longs to see God extend a call to your entire family, you can claim Acts 16:31. It says, "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

This scripture promises that if *you* will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and surrender your life to Him, your decision to follow Him can trigger a chain reaction that can eventually cause the call of God to be extended to your entire family. Make no mistake, God wants

to use your entire family and give them a special purpose. So please let the example of Joseph and Mary's family — and all these other examples — be an encouragement that God really wants to extend a special call to your entire family to do something special too.

If you count all of Jesus' relatives mentioned in the New Testament (not including what we also can glean from extra-biblical writers from the earliest centuries), we know from the Scriptures alone that about 14 members of Jesus' family were involved in the ministry.

Since there were that many family members involved in Jesus' story, it shouldn't surprise us that along the way, they so enjoyed telling the many details they knew about Jesus' miraculous birth, as well as His life, to early Christian writers, who recorded much of it for posterity.



Mary Is the Main Source for the Christmas Story

The bulk of what we know about the events surrounding Jesus' birth come directly from Mary herself. Before Luke wrote about the birth of Jesus in his gospel, he first interviewed Mary while she lived in Ephesus, where she had moved with the apostle John later in her life.¹² It was Mary herself who vividly told Luke about all the miraculous events that he wrote about in the gospel of Luke.¹³

Mary's memory of these astounding events is referred to in Luke 2:19, where the Bible says, "But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."

The word "kept" in the original Greek means *to keep within oneself in order to closely guard or to accurately and carefully preserve*.





And the word “ponder” means *to lay in order, like one who carefully and meticulously chronicles a story*. Mary was so impacted by this amazing sequence of events in her life and in the life of Jesus that she chronicled all of it in her heart and carefully preserved her memories of it. Then she vividly related to Luke events that included:

- The miraculous happenings that occurred with Zacharias and Elizabeth and the birth of their son John the Baptist (*see Luke 1:5-25*).
- That she was a virgin who had never sexually known a man (*see Luke 1:27*).
- The angel Gabriel’s appearance to her to make the annunciation (*see Luke 1:26-38*).
- That she was supernaturally impregnated by the Holy Spirit (*see Luke 1:34-35*).
- John the Baptist’s leaping in the womb of her cousin Elizabeth when Mary arrived to greet her, already pregnant with the Christ Child (*see Luke 1:39-45*).
- Elizabeth’s prophetic confirmation of what the angel Gabriel had privately told Mary at which time Elizabeth also prophesied to her about the Child in her womb (*see Luke 1:42-45*).
- That Mary sang out a prophetic song of praise, given to her by the Holy Spirit (*see Luke 1:46-55*).
- That when John the Baptist was born, his father Zechariah’s tongue was supernaturally loosed, and he prophesied that John the Baptist would prepare the way of the Lord (*see Luke 1:57-79*).

- The worldwide census that took place, requiring her and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem and causing Jesus to be born there “on time” as prophesied (*see Luke 2:1-5*).
- That when Jesus was miraculously born, she wrapped her Son in “swaddling clothes” and “laid him in a manger” (*see Luke 2:7*).
- That shepherds came to see the Baby because a heavenly host of angels announced to them that Jesus had been born (*see Luke 2:8-18*).
- Simeon’s and Anna’s prophetic words spoken over Jesus at His dedication in the Temple (*see Luke 2:25-38*).
- That they returned to Nazareth as a family of three: Joseph, Mary, and Jesus (*see Luke 2:39*).

But then when we go back to Matthew’s account of these miraculous events, the gospel of Matthew includes additional information that Luke did not write about in his gospel. Luke’s account ends with the family returning to Nazareth, but Matthew records some events Luke did not record, as well as other significant occurrences that happened after the holy family returned to Nazareth.

For example, Matthew tells us that:

- Mary was found with child during her and Joseph’s espousal period (*see Matthew 1:18,19*).
- The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream to tell him to take Mary as his wife even though she was pregnant (*see Matthew 1:20-24*).
- The angel of the Lord gave Joseph the name “Jesus” for the child (*see Matthew 1:21*).





- The angel confirmed to Joseph that Mary was indeed a virgin impregnated by the Holy Spirit (*see* Matthew 1:23).
- The Magi came to Jerusalem to search for Christ (*see* Matthew 2:1).
- The Magi announced a star in the East had supernaturally declared the birth of Christ (*see* Matthew 2:2).
- In fear of Herod, the city of Jerusalem was very upset about the arrival of the Magi (*see* Matthew 2:3).
- Herod interrogated the Scribes in Jerusalem and demanded they identify the exact location where the Messiah would be born (*see* Matthew 2:4-6).
- Herod had diabolical plans to murder the Christ Child (*see* Matthew 2:7,8).
- The Magi were supernaturally redirected by the star to Nazareth (*see* Matthew 2:9,10).
- The Magi entered the house where the holy family lived (*see* Matthew 2:11).
- The Magi fell down on their knees and faces to worship Jesus (*see* Matthew 2:11).
- The Magi gave a grand presentation of treasures and gifts that they brought to Jesus (*see* Matthew 2:11).
- The Magi were supernaturally warned by God in a dream to return home a different way (*see* Matthew 2:12).
- The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream to tell him to immediately flee with Mary and Jesus into Egypt (*see* Matthew 2:13).

- Herod the Great viciously slaughtered babies in Bethlehem (*see* Matthew 2:16-18).
- Herod died (*see* Matthew 2:19).
- God spoke to Joseph in a dream to take Mary and Jesus and return from Egypt home to Israel (*see* Matthew 2:20).
- The holy family returned and lived in Nazareth (*see* Matthew 2:22,23).

If such a long list of miraculous events had happened to you or to your family, don't you think you would never forget them? Luke 2:19 says, "...Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." We have seen that the Greek words in Luke 2:19 emphatically mean that Mary intentionally kept *a precise and correct record of it all* in her heart. Because she did, she eventually shared every piece of the story with Luke and Matthew so they could write it down and eventually share it with others.

In this book, we will be taking a journey through many aspects of these amazing events surrounding the miraculous birth of Christ. As you read *Christmas — The Rest of the Story*, you will read the story of His coming to earth in the flesh, as a baby, like you've never read it before.


But as you proceed to read and to see the beautiful illustrations in this book about Christ's miraculous birth, remember we know it all because Mary never forgot. She kept all of these events in her heart, and she told the full story to the gospel writers, who wrote it all down for you and me to read.

Herein, we learn that you and I should never forget the marvelous things we have witnessed God do in our own lives so that we can share them with others too!

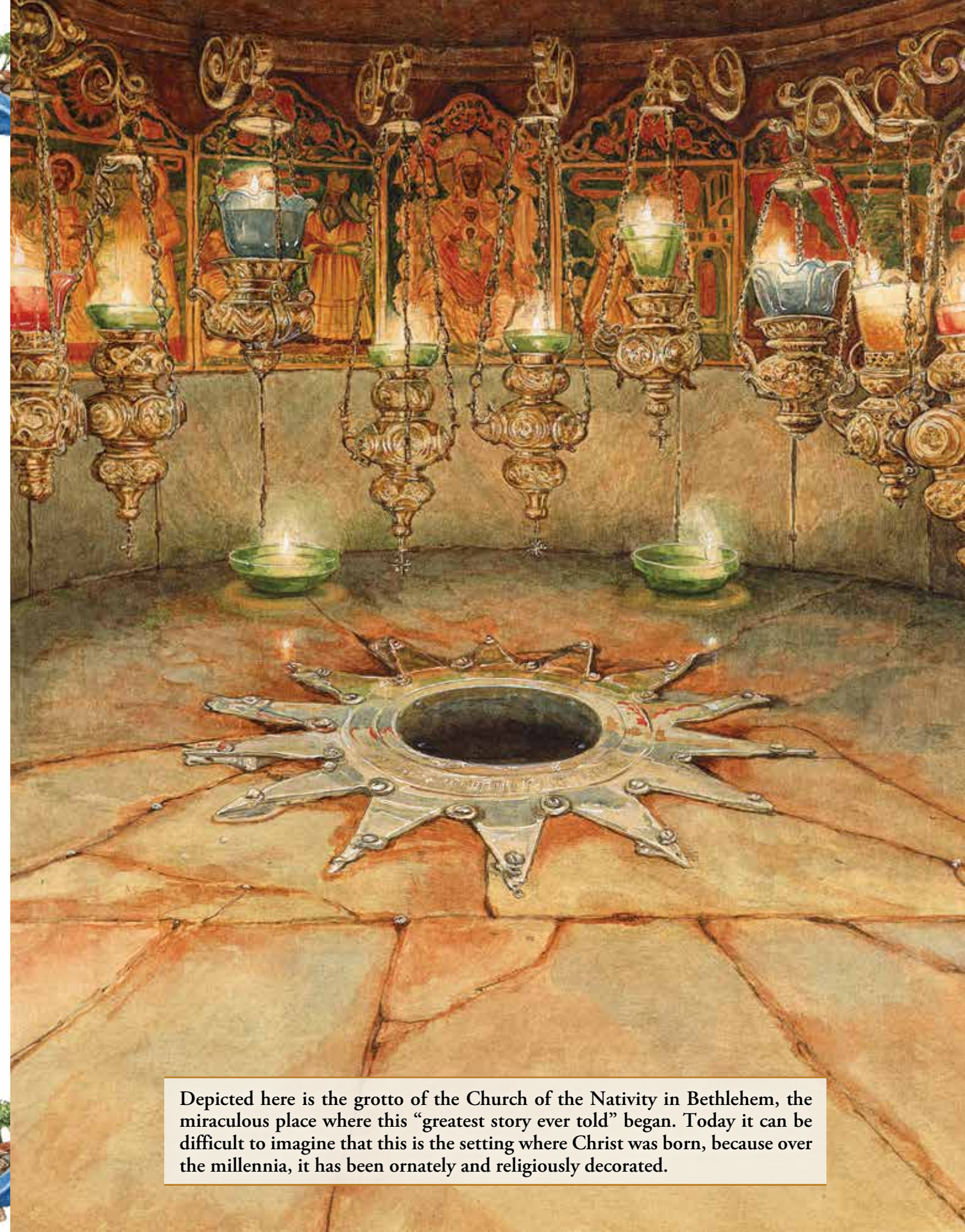




QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS

1. What insights did you learn about the place where Jesus was born? Were these details you already knew, or would you say your image of the place of Jesus' birth has been influenced by Christmas cards over the years? What stands out most in this chapter about the place of Jesus' birth?
 2. Do you recall how many members of Jesus' extended family are identified by name in the New Testament? How many children did Joseph and Mary have after the birth of Jesus? Can you name which books of the New Testament were written by two brothers of Jesus? If so, what are they?
 3. God extends His call to entire families, but how is that call triggered in most families? What part can you play in seeing the call of God come to your entire family? Who in your family has already responded to God's call and is serving the Lord? Which member of your family does God seem to be working on right now?
 4. Mary vividly remembered the details surrounding Jesus' supernatural birth. What miraculous events in your life can you recall? Do you regularly share your testimony with others?
 5. Both Luke and Matthew wrote significantly about the Christmas story. Do you read and discuss these gospel accounts with your family during the holidays? If you haven't in the past, have you determined that you will begin doing it now?
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Depicted here is the grotto of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the miraculous place where this “greatest story ever told” began. Today it can be difficult to imagine that this is the setting where Christ was born, because over the millennia, it has been ornately and religiously decorated.