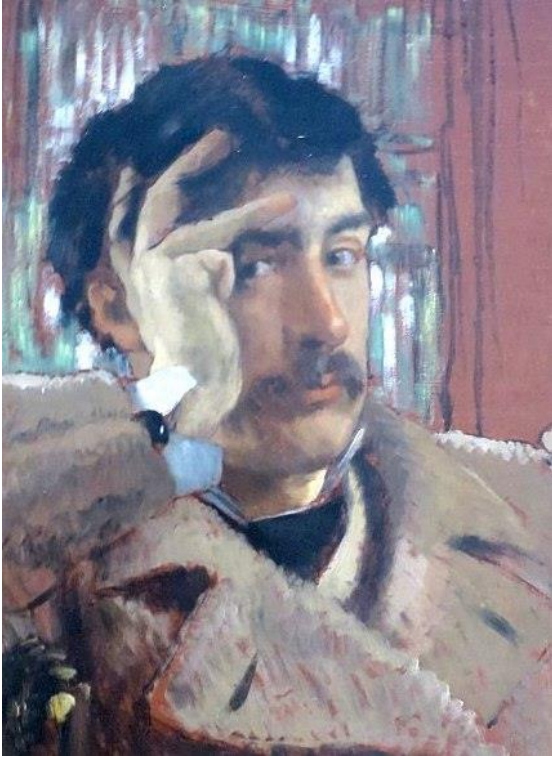


MESSIAH

By Lorri Frandsen

ARTWORK BY JAMES TISSOT



Jacques Joseph Tissot, or James Tissot as he was also known, was a French painter and illustrator who lived from 1836 to 1902. He moved to London in 1871 and became famous as a painter of fashionably dressed women depicted in scenes of everyday life. His greatest works were those of scenes and characters from the Bible. Tissot was Catholic but had a spiritual experience in 1885 that caused him to devote the rest of his life to making paintings about Biblical events. Although French artists, at this time, were moving towards impressionism, pointillism, and oil medium, Tissot leaned towards realism in his watercolors. When he painted 365 watercolors of the life of Christ, he won critical acclaim in Paris, London and New York.

This author died in 1902, so this work is in the public domain in its country of origin and other countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's life plus 100 years or less.

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This book is a simplified narrative account of the life of Jesus in language that is inspiring to people of all ages. It is not a paraphrase of the gospels but rather a vivid, summarized composite of the events recounted by the gospel writers. Some events may be missing, but the main incidents are all included with brief commentary where applicable. The author has tried to write the Lord's story in such a way that readers will be captivated by its truth. Since a full grasp of the mystery of God's grace in Christ Jesus can only come about with the aid of the Holy Spirit's enlightening influence, it was my constant prayer that He would guide me every step of the way to represent His mind and heart as faithfully as possible as I penned these pages. While writing this account, I have been immensely encouraged and inspired as the character of Jesus unfolded, bringing a deeper appreciation and a more intimate experience of His love and grace. My hope is that this book will bring the same inspiration and joy to the reader.

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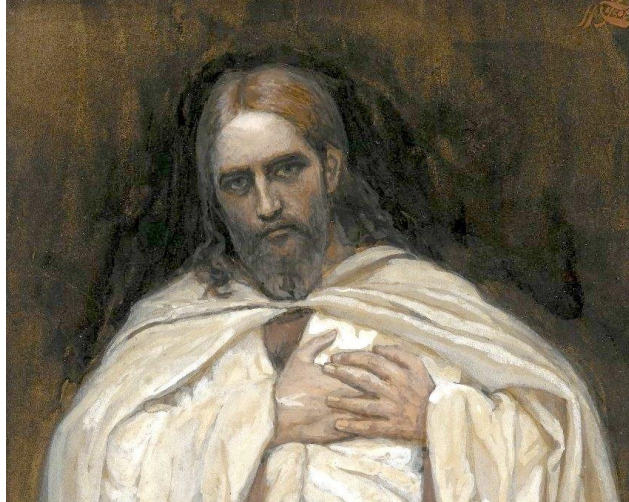
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It is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no heart has imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him." (1Corinthians 2:9)

In the beginning, before the world was ever created, God had an amazing plan to create human beings made in His image, who would be able to communicate with Him directly. They would be able to love God and become as holy as He, with minds and hearts like His own. They would also have freedom of choice, because without it, love cannot exist. By its very nature, love must be able to freely choose its object of affection. And God definitely wanted to be loved by these beings, even though God was aware that initially they would rebel against Him and go their own way. As God looked into the future He saw that their rescue would come at great cost to Himself. Not all would even want to be rescued, but those who did, would belong to Him and love Him as much as He loved them. God believed it was worth the price and so He began creating this world according to His master plan. He began with two human beings, Adam and Eve, who represented their entire race. All those who came after them would be affected by the decisions made by these two. Just as God had foreknown, the couple rebelled against Him and at the moment of their sin, they died spiritually and the process of physical deterioration set in. Their decision doomed the entire world. They, and all their descendants, were now cut off from God and placed under a death sentence. The Holy God could no longer commune with them because their spirits were dead and their corrupted, mortal bodies were now unfit for heaven. However God greatly loved humankind and He had a plan that would involve recreating them to be sinless in spirit, with eternal, indestructible bodies. God's own Spirit would be combined with theirs, so as to give them a nature like His own and make them worthy with His worth. No longer would His beloved ones be enslaved by sin or separated from Him. However it required God becoming a human being so as to represent humanity, both on the cross, where humankind would die, and in the resurrection, where humanity would be recreated to live with God forever. And so divinity joined with humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ, the God/man who became the Savior of the world.

CHAPTER 1

Birth, Magi, Jesus in the Temple



The Word

What we know of Jesus is mostly written in the New Testament gospels. There are few other historical references to Him outside of the Bible and very few that were written before 30AD. Thankfully we have the four gospels of the New Testament which were written by friends of Jesus - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Matthew and Luke begin their accounts with the birth of Jesus Christ as a baby in Bethlehem; Mark begins with the Lord's baptism in the Jordan River. However John, the closest to Jesus of all the disciples, begins his narrative at the very beginning of creation, calling Jesus "the Word" who was already there before anything came into being.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him. Without him was not anything made that has been made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness hasn't overcome it. The Word became flesh, and lived among us. We saw his glory, such glory as of the one and only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-5,14)

John's reference to the 'Word' is taken from Old Testament passages such as Psalm 33:6 *'By Yahweh's word, the heavens were made; all their army by the breath of his mouth'* and Psalm 107:19-20: *'When they cry to Yahweh in their trouble, he saves them out of their distresses. He sends his word, and heals them, and delivers them from their graves.'*

John personifies the Word, saying that He was present with God at creation, and was actually God Himself. He goes on to say that this Word had God's very own life in Him and this life served as a light for all people, breaking through the spiritual darkness that was in the world. In fact the world was actually created through the Word. John further states that the Word became flesh and lived among His chosen people, the Jews, for a time. However most of them did not recognize Him as the promised Messiah.

The name "Jesus Christ" is the same as "Jesus the Messiah." The word 'Messiah' comes from a Hebrew word meaning, "anointed one" or "chosen one." The Greeks used the word Christos or, in English, Christ.

One of the reasons why the Jews did not recognize Jesus as their Messiah was because Jesus plainly identified Himself as God, and this was blasphemous to their ears. Usually Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of God, or the Son of Man, but He also made many references to being equal to God and this the Jews could not accept. They were expecting a Messiah who was a prophet like Daniel or Ezekiel, a male descendant from David's line who would become a great ruler during a Messianic Age. He would reign in God's name over all the world until no other gods would be worshipped anywhere. He would make Israel a great and mighty nation, pre-eminent over all other nations and he would rule over the earth with such power that nothing would be able to defeat him. Biblical prophecy also indicated that he would be born through a Jewish woman and the Jewish scholars and priests laboriously pored over the scriptures, trying to discover where he would be born and when this great event would take place. There were over 300 prophecies written from 400 to 1,000 years previous to His coming, one favorite being by the prophet Malachi.

'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Yahweh... He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.'(Malachi 4:5-6)

After Malachi, however, no other prophet arose in Israel for 400 long years. During all that time God was silent and all the Jews could do was anxiously wait for their Messiah, looking for the promised Elijah to come and make him known. Then one day, after centuries of anticipation, the fulfillment of this prophecy finally arrived!

Just as God had promised, He sent the 'Elijah' prophet in advance, son of an old Levite priest named Zechariah who served in the Temple in Jerusalem. This priest had never had children because his wife Elizabeth was barren, and now that he was old, he undoubtedly felt the time for fatherhood was long past.



As Zechariah served before God (high priests were chosen by lot to go into the temple to burn incense), an angel of the Lord appeared before him, standing by the altar of incense. Zechariah was overcome with fear. The angel tried to calm him by saying: *“Don’t be afraid, Zacharias, because your request has been heard, and your wife, Elizabeth, will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. You will have joy and gladness; and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will drink no wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord, their God. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to prepare a people prepared for the Lord.”* (Luke 1:13-17)

Unfortunately Zechariah didn't believe the angel, asking: *“How can I be sure of this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.”* (Luke 1:18)

Strange that a priest in God's temple, in the presence of a mighty angel, would want further confirmation of the message, but so it was. Of course the angel was not pleased with this lack of faith. He introduced himself as the mighty 'Gabriel' who stands in the presence of God. The angel was saying in effect: "Do you know who you are questioning?! I received this message from God Himself, in whose presence I stand continually!" This was the very angel who had interpreted a vision for the prophet Daniel hundreds of years earlier, after he and the archangel Michael fought against powerful demonic principalities who were hindering Gabriel from bringing God's message to Daniel concerning Israel and the coming Messiah. Michael (mightiest of all angels) had been summoned to step in to aid Gabriel in the battle. Together the two archangels overcame the opposition. Gabriel's glorious appearance had caused Daniel to be so frightened that he had fallen on his face in abject terror. One can see from this instance that Gabriel was obviously of considerably high status and his appearance reflected this. He had been entrusted with momentous news for Daniel and now he had been given the wonderful privilege of bringing amazing news to Zechariah, only to hear the priest doubt his words. It was a huge insult to God, and Gabriel told Zechariah that because of his unbelief he would lose his ability to speak until the day of his son's birth. Meanwhile, the people outside were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the Holy of Holies. When he came out, he couldn't speak to them and they realized he had seen a vision in the temple. When his time of service at the temple was over, he returned home.

Shortly after this, just as Gabriel had declared, Zechariah's wife became pregnant, creating great joy in the hearts of the old couple, and probably more than a little wonder in the minds of their neighbors.

In the Old Testament, Isaac, Samson, and Samuel had been miraculously born to mothers who were barren, and now it appeared that God was doing something unusual with Elizabeth as well. Some may have speculated that the child born to Zechariah and his wife would be a great prophet or maybe even the Messiah himself!

It was in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy that God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee. This time the archangel was carrying a message for a young girl, a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary, and Gabriel greeted her with the astounding message that God highly favored her. Mary was shocked by the archangel's presence and she was troubled by his words. She was probably only a young girl about 15 years of age, the usual age of marriage at that time, but she was still quite young and probably very innocent. It is understandable that she would have been distressed. Gabriel soothed her with the words: *"Don't be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb, and give birth to a son, and will call his name 'Jesus.' He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. There will be no end to his Kingdom."* (Luke 1:30-33)

Anytime in scripture when God named a child, it was a definite sign that the child would have a divine destiny. In this case, Mary's baby was to be called 'Jesus' which was a fairly common name in the land. It was actually 'Yehoshuah' meaning 'YHWH is salvation'. Mary was still confused because she was a virgin and her marriage was still a ways off, so she wondered how a pregnancy would fit in with her situation. However Gabriel told her that the pregnancy would be no ordinary one. The Holy Spirit would come upon her, overshadowing her with His great power so that a holy infant would be born to her. This babe would be the Son of God Himself. Gabriel's words about the Holy Spirit hovering over Mary drew a parallel with the Holy Spirit hovering over the creation of the world.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty. Darkness was on the surface of the deep and God's Spirit was hovering over the surface of the waters. (Genesis 1:1-2)

Gabriel told her that the power of the Holy Spirit would overshadow her and a holy child would be born to her. This child would be the Son of God. It is doubtful that Mary understood the full import of what Gabriel was saying, but the angel encouraged her faith by telling her of another miracle pregnancy. Her aunt Elizabeth had already conceived even though she was very old. Gabriel added, *'For nothing spoken by God is impossible.'* (Luke 1:37)

Mary's response to this was completely different from that of Zechariah. She was totally submitted to God's will and answered. *"Behold, the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word."* (Luke 1:38)

Then the angel left her.

Unlike the first Eve who denied humanity eternal life through her disobedience, Mary (the second Eve) obeyed God and held out the prospect of eternal life to all. In doing so, Mary became the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy that told of a virgin birth.

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin will conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

Isaiah used the word 'almah' (virgin) which usually refers to a young, unmarried woman of marriageable age. There were two types of virgin in the Hebrew Scriptures - a true virgin, and a betrothed virgin. A betrothed virgin was referred to as a man's wife because the state of betrothal was considered to be as sacred as the married state, and the difference between the two seems to have been a mere formality.

Most Jewish scholars believed that Isaiah used the word 'almah' because he was referring to a young woman who was betrothed. They did not suspect that Isaiah was also referring to a true virgin who had never known a man.



Isaiah's prophecy stated that the virgin's baby would be called 'Immanuel' (a Hebrew word meaning 'God with us'), implying that in some way Deity would be identified with humanity. This does not mean that the Messiah's name would actually be Immanuel. Isaiah prophesied of the Messiah that *'His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'* (Isaiah 9:6). None of these titles were Jesus' actual name, but they were descriptions of Him, clearly prophesying that He would be divine. This scripture should have tipped off the Jews that their Messiah would dwell among them as God in the flesh. However, as mentioned earlier, most Jews did not pick up on this clue.

After Gabriel's visit, Mary hurriedly went to visit her cousin Elizabeth in Judea. Usually parents in Israel carefully guarded their young daughters' purity and this was true even of betrothed brides. It is likely that Mary's parents allowed her to visit Elizabeth and Zechariah because they trusted them to watch over their young daughter. The Bible does not tell us whether Mary told her parents of her angelic visitation before going there. However we are told that when Mary entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth, the six-month fetus inside Elizabeth's womb moved strongly and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She immediately began to prophecy.

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! Why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came into my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy!"

Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of the things which have been spoken to her from the Lord!" (Luke 1:42-45)

The Holy Spirit moved Elizabeth to prophecy like this, and already the tiny, unborn prophet in her womb was announcing the coming of the Messiah. Mary was ecstatic and sang a song to the Lord that clearly praised God as her Savior.

"My soul magnifies the Lord. My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior, for he has looked at the humble state of his servant. For behold, from now on, all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name. His mercy is for generations of generations on those who fear him. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down princes from their thrones. And has exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things. He has sent the rich away empty. He has given help to Israel, his servant, that he might remember mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever." (Luke 1:46-55)

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three or four months, until the birth of Elizabeth and Zechariah's son. The birth of this special baby was in some ways like the birth of Samuel in the Old Testament because both Samuel's mother, Hannah, as well as Elizabeth, were given instructions to treat their sons as Nazarites. The Nazarites were a Jewish sect not permitted to drink any alcohol. Also, just as Samuel anointed David as Israel's king, John the Baptist would later baptize (anoint) Jesus as Israel's King and Messiah.

The day came for the baby to be circumcised, as well as named, and the neighbors gathered around, thinking that the child would be named after his father, as was common. However Elizabeth spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John." This broke with the custom, so they went to Zechariah to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." Immediately he was able to speak, and he began praising God, much to the surprise of everyone in Judea. Everyone wondered what this child was going to be since it was obvious that the Lord's hand was upon him. Then Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and he began to prophesy:

"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people; and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David...salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; to show mercy towards our fathers, to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he spoke to Abraham...And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare his way, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the remission of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the dawn from on high will visit us, to shine on those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death; to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:67-79)

After John's birth, Mary went home to her family, her pregnancy obvious by this time. She would have been at least three or four months along. She must have had some concerns as she approached her hometown.

What would her family and neighbors say? Would they believe her if she told them that she was carrying God's Son? Or would they see her as a fallen woman? Most likely it would be the latter and her family's reputation would be ruined as a result. And then there was Joseph, her betrothed husband. He would know that he was not the father of her unborn baby.

If he didn't believe her story, he would assume she had betrayed him with another man while she was staying at her cousin Elizabeth's home. Mary was already betrothed to Joseph, which was as binding as actual marriage even though the wedding had not yet taken place. The penalty for adultery was death by stoning. That could be her fate if Joseph publicly denounced her as an adulteress. Jewish law was very unforgiving in such matters. Now that she was away from Elizabeth and Zechariah's protection, Mary was on her own.

Well, not really. She had her faith in God's protection to sustain her for she would have remembered Gabriel's visit and his prophetic words to her. Undoubtedly she was convinced that unseen angels were guarding her and the developing baby inside her womb. However, as expected, Joseph did not believe her. Although he was a good man, he was also righteous and he could not bring himself to go through with a marriage to an adulteress who looked to be pregnant with another man's child. However he also didn't want to expose Mary's sin and shame her publicly. He was not interested in revenge in spite of Mary's supposed unfaithfulness. Consequently he determined to divorce her quietly. He was still mulling over this idea when an angel of the Lord came to him in a dream. The fact that God did this is not unusual. After all, the Old Testament gives other examples of God speaking to other people in dreams. Joseph, Solomon, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel all received dreams from the Lord. God often guided His chosen ones in this way and Mary's husband, Joseph, was definitely chosen by God from all eternity to be the father figure for His Son. Consequently God sent His angel to make this very clear to him.

... behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take to yourself Mary, your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She shall give birth to a son. You shall call his name Jesus, for it is he who shall save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:20-21)

Joseph woke up and did what the angel of the Lord commanded him to do. He took Mary home as his wife but he did not have conjugal relations with her until after she gave birth, understanding that as the mother of God's Child, Mary was to be kept holy (set apart).

Now in those days the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, issued a decree that a census was to be taken of the entire Roman world. Roman emperors and governors periodically demanded censuses, although this was the first one for Judea. Because the governor did not collect the taxes over an area himself, he needed an inventory of land and holdings so that he would know what kind of tax money to expect.

Everyone had to go to their place of birth to register, so Joseph was forced to go from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. Micah 5:2 specified that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, being small among the clans of Judah, out of you one will come ... that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings out are from of old, from ancient times. (Micah 5:2)



A lot of Jews would have been heading to Bethlehem because of the Roman census. Normally Joseph and Mary would have been able to stay with relatives in Bethlehem but apparently this wasn't possible. They couldn't even find an inn to accommodate them. The only place available was a stable, probably sheltering the donkeys used by travellers. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and Mary gave birth to a son. She wrapped the baby in cloths and placed him in a manger. Both Mary and Joseph must have wondered why God's Son rested before them in a wooden trough. The king of the universe surely merited better surroundings. But the awe of seeing this tiny life, supernaturally created, surely overrode all other thoughts.

The Bible says there were shepherds with their flocks living nearby, completely unaware that the Great Shepherd Himself had just been born a little ways away. An angel of the Lord appeared to them and God's glory shone around them. This would have been a very bright light, like the pillar of fire that led the Israelites through the Red Sea.



Understandably the shepherds were terrified but the angel calmed them with encouraging words. The angel said to them, *“Don't be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be to all the people. For there is born to you today, in David's city, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This is the sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a feeding trough.”* (Luke 2:10-12)

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying: *"Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men."* (Luke 2:10-14)

Then the angels returned to heaven, leaving the shepherds to query this amazing event. They determined to go to Bethlehem to see this miracle for themselves, and just as the angel had said, they found Mary and Joseph, with their newborn infant lying in a manger. After seeing him, the excited shepherds spread the word throughout town and all who heard it were amazed.

Back at the stable, Mary, who was apparently the thoughtful type, treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. There was so much to take in. So many things were happening that were beyond human understanding. After this Joseph and Mary had Jesus circumcised on the eighth day so as to fulfill the Law's requirement. The act of circumcision was a physical act contained in the Law of Moses.

"Sanctify to me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of animal. It is mine." (Exodus 13:2)

It was at this time that Joseph would have given Jesus his name, signifying Joseph's

It would later be revealed by the apostle Paul that circumcision under the Law actually had great spiritual significance for New Covenant believers. Under the Old Covenant, a ring of physical flesh was removed from a baby's penis to attest to his birth into the Jewish community. But it was only a foreshadowing of a spiritual reality, which would occur later when Christ came on the scene to inaugurate the New Covenant. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, a believer would then be transformed in his soul by the Holy Spirit who would sever his old sin nature (symbolized by the flesh around a penis) from his reborn spirit. That circumcision would make a person an eternal son of Israel.

'But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not of the letter; whose praise is not from men, but from God.' (Romans 2:29)

In whom you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body the sins of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ. (Colossians 2:11)

legal adoption of the child.

The gospels of Matthew and Luke both carefully list Jesus' genealogy in order to

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