

# The Divine Disguise

By Ben Godwin

One author wrote, “Christmas is when God came down the stairs of heaven with a baby in His arms.” What if Jesus had come as He deserved? Surely He would have been born with all the pomp and prestige of royalty. Instead, he was born in a smelly stable, wrapped in swaddling clothes used to wipe the sweat from farm animals and laid in a cattle trough (manger). The unassuming way in which He made His human debut defies reason. Jesus later said, “...I am meek and lowly in heart.” This was never more powerfully portrayed than in His nativity.



Think of it, Jesus was born in a borrowed stable, preach one of His first sermons in a borrowed boat, rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey and was finally buried in a borrowed grave. But don't be fooled by the humble beginnings. It was all part of a divine disguise. God carefully planned Jesus' birth to be so inconspicuous that, except for a handful of people (shepherds, Wise Men, Herod, Simeon, Anna, etc.), it would go virtually unnoticed.

## 30 Ordinary Years

It's difficult to understand why Jesus lived the majority of His life in obscurity. After His supernatural conception and birth, there is only one brief childhood glimpse of Him in Scripture—at His *Bar Mitzveh* in the Temple when He confounded the lawyers with His wisdom at age twelve. (Luke 2:40-51) Then, at age thirty, He began His public ministry. Remarkably, for thirty years the Son of God didn't perform a single miracle, preach a sermon, cast out a demon or do anything noteworthy for the sacred record. We are left to wonder why? Again, I believe it was all part of the divine disguise. Jesus' first thirty years were so ordinary that most people of His day missed His coming altogether. The Jews expected a Messiah with the political savvy and the military skill to rid them of the Roman invaders who occupied their land. But Jesus didn't come to save His people from the Romans, He came to “save His people *from their sins*.” (Matthew. 1:21)

## Concealed As A Carpenter

To the Jews, Jesus was too common to be the Messiah. In fact, when Jesus stood in the synagogue in Nazareth and revealed His true identity, His own townsmen said, “Is this not *the carpenter*, Joseph's son?” (See Mark. 6:3, Luke 4:22) Then they accused Him of blasphemy and tried to throw Him over a cliff. But He escaped and, instead of proving His divinity, Jesus left them to their own misguided views. After all, Messiahs don't build furniture, do they?

Perhaps you've noticed how Joseph vanishes from the Biblical record after the incident in the Temple when Jesus was twelve. Joseph was probably much older than Mary (which was common in those days). According to church tradition, Joseph died when Jesus was around eighteen years old (whether of illness or old age is uncertain). We do know that, after Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary had four other sons and at least two daughters (Matthew 13:55-56), which dispels the belief that Mary was a perpetual virgin. Jesus, being the eldest son, followed in His father's trade as was customary. So during the twelve years from Joseph's death until He commenced His ministry, Jesus toiled as a common carpenter and, no doubt, helped His mother, Mary, support and raise His younger siblings. Imagine the architect of the universe disguised as a carpenter. What a clever disguise! People would naturally expect the Messiah to pursue a more glamorous occupation. But from the dawn of time He had a knack for building things. Ironically, Joseph had the privilege of teaching Him how to hammer His first nail, not knowing that He would later be nailed to a tree.

There are at least three important lessons we learn from Jesus' first thirty "silent years":

1. **Preparation:** Jesus could have taken the world by storm as a teenage Messiah. Instead, He prepared Himself for the Father's perfect will and timing. Priests under the Levitical order entered the priesthood at age thirty. Perhaps this was another way the Great High Priest fulfilled Moses' Law to the letter.
2. **Occupational Value:** The fact that Jesus labored in a mundane career shows us the importance of work and how God attaches honor and meaning to and confirms the work of our hands. If we are too big for small jobs then we are too small for big jobs!
3. **Family Priority:** After Joseph's untimely death, Jesus became the "man of the house." He was there to fulfill His filial duties for His younger siblings before He ever began His ministry. This demonstrates the high priority God places on the family, even above ministry. God instituted the family long before the church. What does it profit to gain the whole world and lose your family. Jesus' brothers and sisters, who were initially skeptical of His claims, later came around to believe in Him (Acts 1:14).

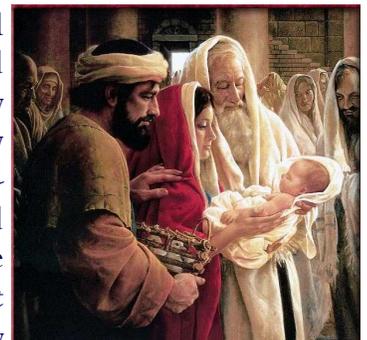
## Unanswered Questions

The divine disguise worked to perfection. The Jewish nation, with a few exceptions, rejected Jesus and His claims to Messiahship—"He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own and *His own received Him not.*" (John 1:10-11) Jesus was probably the most misunderstood and rejected man to ever live. First, there was the geographical problem. Some of the religious leaders who were nearly convinced He was the Christ hit this little hang up. "*Hath not the scripture said, that Christ cometh...out of the town of Bethlehem...Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.*" (See John 7:40-53) Of course, we know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem to fulfill prophecy and then grew up in the Galilean town of Nazareth. It is both amazing and amusing to me that Jesus never bothered to set the record straight. He simply let them argue over their opinions.

Then there is the illegitimacy question—"We be not born of fornication" (John 8:41), implying that they believed Jesus was a bastard. Yes, the recycled rumors of Mary's pregnancy before she and Joseph were properly wed were still circulating thirty years after Jesus' birth. Again, Jesus didn't defend Himself or His mother's virtue or even bother to explain that His supernatural conception fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 7:14) of a virgin-born Messiah. He simply let them have their say.

## The Virgin Birth's Necessity

The virgin birth was not only vital to the fulfillment of prophecy but equally vital to the redemption of man. Had Jesus had an earthly, biological father, He would have inherited the same tainted bloodline and fallen nature we have. The only way to save sinful humanity was with a sinless sacrifice. The virgin birth was absolutely essential in order for Jesus to be "*holy, harmless, undefiled, [and] separate from sinners.*" (Hebrews 7:26) Without it, Jesus would have been subject to sin and we would still be hopelessly lost in our sins. But Jesus was supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit. This "immaculate conception" prompted Paul to write, "*And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: **God was manifest in the flesh...***" (I Timothy 3:16) Unexplainable yet perfectly believable!



## Why The Mystery?

The incarnation distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. What other belief system claims that God became a man, lived a sinless life, died a vicarious death and rose victoriously from the grave? It is unquestionably the greatest story ever told! Then why was it shrouded in such mystery? Because, minus the mystery, Israel probably would have embraced Jesus as the Messiah, thus negating the reason He was born—to bleed (*without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins*). Jesus deliberately disguised Himself in order to be rejected and His rejection and subsequent crucifixion facilitated man's redemption. As Billy Graham wrote, "Bethlehem's manger crib became the link that bound a lost world to a loving God." The Christmas story was aptly summarized by the late C. S. Lewis, "The Son of God became man to enable men to become sons of God." Think of it—the Messiah as a baby in a manger, the Christ as a carpenter in a career, the Son of God as a common criminal on a cross. It was all part of the divine disguise. So don't be fooled by the divine disguise, for beneath this carpenter's cloak, you'll find God robed in human flesh. "And the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)