

Field Notes:

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Christmas and agriculture are close allies.

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Having been raised on a farm here in Attala County I may be biased when I say that Christmas is likely the most important time of year of those of us involved in Agriculture. Most of us are from families that were strongly Christian so the reason we celebrate Christmas has never been a mystery to us.

The setting that is referred to as a stable is something we can easily relate to since most of us worked with farm animals throughout our years growing up with our parents on the farm.

We understand that a manger was not a bad place or a situation that did not lend itself to the birth of a child. Why would it be since virtually all kinds of farm animals are born there? In fact it seems to me one of the most natural things.

The old story that Joseph could not find a place for Mary to sleep and later deliver Jesus is for me a poor description of the actual situation. Inns during that time were nothing like we might expect today. The occupants slept in rooms together, probably without any heat except for what was produced by their bodies. Can you imagine all the snoring and other sounds not to mention the smells, the diseases and pests they carried with them from all over the Roman Empire.

In fact I believe the innkeeper did them a big favor in placing them in the stable with the animals where there would have been hay for bedding and the warmth of animals to take the edge off the cold of a longer winter night. All of this had obviously been planned, and it came to reality to set the stage for the story we all know today.

When Jesus was born Mary wrapped him in warm clothing that she had brought for this purpose, and she laid him in the hay trough we still understand to have been a manger. After the birth a very bright star was seen in the eastern sky which those who studied the stars knew it to be an indication that the King of the Jews had been born. These educated men came from the far corners of the known world bringing gifts.

One of the most unusual events was the visitation of an angel to shepherds who lived with their sheep in the field. This confirms to me the apparent importance of these lowly people who as shepherds producing sheep for their wool were highly regarded as important members of society. The actual story makes it sound like they all left their sheep and traveled to see the child, but anyone who understands will know that some went and some stayed with the flocks to guard them from the predators of the night.

This was the beginning of the story, but during this time agriculture was the key occupation that sustained society, just as it is today. Only then it required most of the population to do all the work required to produce the food and clothing they needed. Then came the final act as Jesus entered Jerusalem the week he was crucified, includes Him riding into the city on a donkey, a beast of burden that was used to care for and transport farm products.

Agriculture cannot be removed from this great story, and this has translated into the faith of so many people of the land today. You might say it's in our DNA.

Merry Christmas, and thanks for your time.