

## FOREWORD

It is a surprising fact that, although the Western world ‘celebrates’ Christmas once a year, and expends literally billions of pounds, dollars and euros in the process, there are precious few books on the subject of “Christmas” itself. In spite of this, “Christmas” continues to attract interest from the media and press, especially if some aspect of “the story” can be debunked or questioned. In the UK in 2004 The Times newspaper carried a short article about the three wise men titled “*Were they wise? Or men?*”<sup>1</sup> Two years earlier on much the same subject, but this time a different newspaper: the London Evening Standard carried “*Three Kings ... or was it four Persian priests at the nativity?*”<sup>2</sup>

In the UK, over the 2004 Christmas period there were three media presentations on aspects of the ‘story’. Terry Jones, a famous UK comedian, presented a radio programme aimed at rehabilitating Herod ‘the Great’ called “*Let’s Hear it for King Herod*”. BBC TV screened a documentary on the *wise men* which, allowing that it was a TV programme by a secular organisation, was remarkably “fair” but prone to drawing firm conclusions from very slim evidence. And The Economist newspaper in its final 2004 edition claimed that Emperor Augustus’ census could not have happened at the time of Christ’s birth – and then presented an argument for reaching this conclusion.

Whilst this short book was being prepared, in 2002 Philip Greenslade’s book *The Perfect Gift*<sup>3</sup> was published by CWR. This is an excellent set of devotional studies of the Christmas story,

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and is highly recommended as such. It does not aim to evaluate the historical narrative, but rather to draw out theological lessons from it. Nearly two generations earlier Dr Leon Morris's equally recommended *The Story of the Christ Child*<sup>4</sup> was published, in 1960. This was also primarily a devotional study. Although both books consider certain historical evidence, neither aims to evaluate this evidence in depth.

This book, by contrast, seeks to examine various aspects of what is popularly thought of as “the Christmas story”. It is hoped that readers will be blessed by God as they consider anew, or perhaps for the very first time, the amazing claims made in His Word – what we call the Holy Bible – about His Word, the Lord Jesus.

The subject is reviewed in three main sections:

1. Background
2. Biblical Account of the Nativity
3. Controversies

The biblical accounts we have of the birth of Jesus are disarmingly straightforward but found in a complex theological, historical and political setting. In spite of their simplicity, the accounts are consistent, believable and a satisfactory preamble to the life and works of Jesus, the Messiah. They are also a profound challenge in our own day, to believers and non-believers alike!

*Peter Sammons*

### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 10 February 2004.

<sup>2</sup> *The Evening Standard*, 16 December 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Greenslade, *The Perfect Gift* (CWR, 2002)  
ISBN 1-85345-246-7.

<sup>4</sup> Dr Leon Morris *The Story of the Christ Child* (Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1960).