

III. The Virgin Birth and the Angelic Annunciation:

Luke 2:6 - While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth.

v. 7 - And Mary gave birth to her first-born Son and she wrapped Him in cloths [**σπαργανόω, sparganóō**]¹ and she laid Him in a manger [**φάτνη, phátñē**] because there was no room for them in the inn.

v. 8 - In that same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields keeping watch over their flock by night.

v. 9 - And an angel from the Lord [**Γαβριήλ, Gabriēl: seraph rank king of arms of the Angelic College of Heralds**]² stood before them and the glory of the Lord shined around them and the shepherds were very afraid.

v. 10 - And the angel said to them, “Stop being afraid! For behold, I bring you good news of great happiness which shall be for all people.

v. 11 - “Today, in the city of David there has been born for your benefit a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Two passages from the Old Testament were fulfilled at the time of this annunciation to the shepherds: d

Micah 5:2 - “As for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, yet from you One will go forth on My behalf to be ruler of Israel [**true humanity**]. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity [**undiminished deity**].”

¹ “Swaddling-band [also: ‘bandage: to wrap up in cloths.’]. The child is laid on the cloth diagonally and the corners are folded over the feet and body and under the head, the bandages then being tied so as to hold the cloth in position. This device forms the clothing of the child until it is about a year old.” (Burton Scott Easton, “Swaddle” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, gen. ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 4:2874.

² It is my opinion that the messenger angel in this passage is Gabriel, a seraph-rank archangel. Gabriel is the one that announced the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:8–13) and informed Mary that God has chosen her to be the one to conceive and deliver the Messiah (Luke 1:27–31). It follows that, although the “angel of the Lord” cited in Luke 2:8–14 is not named, it is logical to consider that the one announcing the birth of Christ would also be Gabriel.



Isaiah 7:14 - “Therefore, the Lord Himself shall give you a miraculous sign: Behold, the virgin shall become pregnant and bear a Son, and she will call His name Immanuel [**God with us**].”

IV. The Sign of the Cross:

Luke 2:12 - “This {*will be*} sign [σημεῖον (*sēmeíon*)³] is for your benefit: you will find the Baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a feeding trough.” (EXT)

There is a technical grammatical arrangement leading off this verse that causes a very subtle, but yet misleading translations in all the major English Bibles. The four major ones read basically the same: “This will be a sign for you” (NIV); “This *will be* a sign for you” (NASB) “And this *shall be* a sign unto you” (KJV); “And this *will be* a sign to you.” (NKJV)

However, the future tense of the verb εἰμί, *eimí*: “will be,” is not in the Greek manuscripts. The grammar demands it, but it is not unusual for the sake of emphasis to leave the verb out of certain sentences and such is the case here.

The emphasis is on the word σημεῖον, *sēmeíon*, and translated “sign.” The verse begins with the pronoun οὗτός, *houtós*, translated “this.” It draws attention to the subject, “sign.”

What follows is an ellipsis where the verb *eimí* would ordinarily go and then the subject: “This *will be* a sign” would be the complete translation. The word for “sign”: *sēmeíon*, would normally be in the nominative case, but, instead, it is in the accusative case. This opens up a number of possibilities for the exact translation. But in context, the emphasis is not going to be on the sign itself but on what the sign represents.

Therefore, the following conclusion is reached: *sēmeíon* is a nominative subject in accusative form. This demands that the verb *eimí* be supplied for the ellipsis. Because of the accusative form the following translation emerges: “This sign is for your benefit.”

The word *sēmeíon*, or “sign,” has three applications in context all of which are to the benefit of the shepherds as well as all believers of any generation:

³ “σημεῖον (*sēmeíon*). A sign by which something is designated, distinguished, known. Specifically, a sign by which the character and truth of any person or thing is known, a proof (Luke 2:12). A sign by which the divine power in majesty is made known, a supernatural event ... or miracle by which the power and presence of God is manifested.” (*The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, rev. ed., Spiros Zodhiates, gen. ed. [Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993], s.v. 4592 p. 1286.



1. Something by which something is known. By this sign we will be able to learn a very important doctrine.
2. A system which teaches something important. A very important doctrine is going to be associated with the Messiah's clothing and location. It helps describe the "good news of great happiness" spoken by Gabriel in verse 10.
3. A sign for identification of a person of great importance. The mission of the Messiah is revealed in the sign.

What follows is the revelation of the sign in two sentences. Number 1: "You will find the Baby wrapped in strips of cloth."

The words, "wrapped in strips of cloth," are one word in the Greek, the perfect passive participle of the verb, **σπαργανόω, sparganóō**: "having been wrapped in strips of cloth." The etymology of this word is instructive:

1. *Sparganóō* was first used by Hippocrates, the fourth-century B.C. Greek physician known as the Father of Medicine. However, he is incorrectly credited with writing the Hippocratic oath administered to graduate physicians.
2. The best definition of *sparganóō* is "burial wrap." In the ancient world, medical areas had a supply of this cloth available so that whenever a patient died he could be immediately wrapped and buried.
3. When a wounded patient was being treated for cuts, swaths of this material were torn off and used as bandages.
4. That the newly born Christ Child is wrapped in burial cloths is said by Gabriel to be a sign: the Messiah is identified with death on the day of His birth.
5. Those who were believers would be able to understand the sign. They could relate Old Testament prophecies with a suffering Messiah. For example:

Isaiah 53:5 He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our peace [**reconciliation**] fell upon Him, and by his scourging we are healed [**spiritually**].

v. 9 His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man [**Joseph of Arimathaea**] in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

NOTE: Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Sanhedrin who, after the Crucifixion, obtained the body of Jesus and placed it in his own unused tomb (Matthew 27:57–60); Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50–53); John 19:38). It is mentioned in the New Testament only in connection with the story of Arimathea.⁴

6. These shepherds' knowledge of such passages of Scripture enabled them to understand the sign of the death wrappings around the newborn Messiah.
7. The Father's plan for salvation called for the undiminished deity of the Second Person of the Trinity to become inseparably united with true humanity, yet without sin.
8. This required the virgin pregnancy and the virgin birth.
9. Without a human father, Jesus was born as Adam was created. He was trichotomous, minus an inherited sin nature, and therefore, minus the imputation of Adam's original sin.
10. Consequently, on that first Christmas night, Jesus arrived in this world as a Lamb without spot or blemish—the very same description applied to the sheep the shepherds were guarding on the outskirts of Bethlehem.
11. These were sacrificial animals—without spot or blemish—whose blood covered the sins of the people on each Day of Atonement.
12. Jesus as the Christ was destined to be a substitute for the people; He was decreed to die on the cross once for all.

Romans 5:8 - God demonstrated His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died as a substitute for us.

1 Peter 2:24 - He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds we are now healed.

2 Corinthians 5:21 - God made Him Who knew no sin to be made sin as a substitute for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

⁴ S. Barabas. "Arimathea." *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopaedia of the Bible*, gen. ed., Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House 1976), 1:301.



13. In Romans 5:8 and 2 Corinthians 5:21 we see the translation “as a substitute for us.” This includes the proposition ὑπέρ (*hupér*) which is usually translated “for us.” Combined with the genitive of advantage of the pronoun ἐγὼ (*egō*), translated “us,” the phrase can be rendered “on behalf of us,” or “instead of us.” Both carry the idea of substitution and this is the best way to translate the phrase: “as a substitute for us.”
14. The Christ Child wrapped in burial cloths is a sign that He entered this life at the first Christmas with the assigned mission to become our substitute: to die spiritually for our sins (Isaiah 53:9) and to die physically so that we might have a resurrection body just like His (1 John 3:2).
15. The substitutionary death of Christ is often diminished, ignored, or unknown to those who write commentaries. Yet it is the source of our salvation although His physical death is quite often assumed to be.
16. Here are two sources that comment on מָוֶת (*maweth*) the Hebrew word for death which is found in:

Isaiah 53:9 - His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His deaths [מָוֶת (*maweth*)], because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

53:9 death. In the Hebrew the word rendered “death” is an intensive plural. It has been suggested that it speaks of the violence of Christ’s death, the very pain of which made it like a repeated death.⁵

מֹתָי [*mothe*] is a plural exaggerativus here; it is applied to a violent death, the very pain of which makes it like dying again and again.⁶

17. What is missed by C. I. Scofield and Franz Delitzsch is that Jesus died twice on the cross, therefore, the plural should be translated literally instead of as an intensive. The New Testament distinguishes these two deaths by the use of two Greek words for death:

⁵ C. I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Study Bible: NASB* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 991n.

⁶ Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 3d ed., trans., James Martin (1877; repr., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), 2:329.

