

Lydia's Cloth

Isaiah 9:6-7

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD, Almighty will accomplish this.”

Tid-Bit Information: Bethlehem is a small village, 5-6 miles south of Jerusalem. Land is hilly—with lots of rocks. Temperature can be 25 to 75 degrees. May through October no rain and December through March is the rainy season. On the road to Bethlehem you would see scrubby trees—oak, cedar, olive, and myrtle are some. Most people walk to Bethlehem from Jerusalem on a narrow winding road. One could possibly travel 15 miles on a good day. They would never travel on the Sabbath. Roads from Jericho to Jerusalem were very treacherous, steep, narrow, and lots of places for robbers to hide. In Bethlehem you could find many beggars too. Just east of Bethlehem you can see the white and chalky wilderness of Judea.

Getting Married: Ages of bridegroom 17-18 and bride 13-17. The father of the bridegroom-to-be would go to the father of the bride to negotiate a bride price that his son is willing to pay in exchange for marrying her (A young woman was regarded as an asset, and consequently the girl’s father expected to be compensated for his loss.) Once negotiations were complete, a betrothal ceremony took place in front of witnesses. For the next 12 months, the usual period of betrothal, the couple was considered practically married. A child born during that waiting period was considered legitimate. But it was not until the wedding ceremony that the bride left her father’s house to move with the bridegroom or his family.

CENSUS: the Romans started the census system shortly before Jesus' birth. They require registration every 14 years. People were required to return to the place of their birth to get their property registered so Rome would know how much tax would be charged. The Roman soldiers would be intolerant of the fanatical Jews—but tolerant of the quiet Jew. They can compel anyone to carry their burden for one mile.

Jewish Marketplace: Narrow streets, noisy, aggressive sellers, smelly. Bartering is the way to buy—don't walk up and pay the first price. Food in the marketplace comes in from local areas. Spices and citrus fruit are shipped in and more expensive. Have olive oil for lamps, cooking, and medicine, bread, vegetables, and fruit. No corn around in the 1st century.

Baskets would be cheap, not considered a high skill labor, 20 lepta. Sandals, pottery would be more expensive. Barter grain in bushels. Consider how long and skilled an item requires and barter accordingly.

CUSTOMS: Business as property transfers, marriages, etc. was transacted at the village gate. The Elders sat on benches there. The SYNAGOGUE is a place of learning. Scribes are experts of law and instruct in the synagogue. Priests serve in the Temples ONLY—there was no Temple in Bethlehem. Women didn't have equal rights—only in work. They worked in the fields alongside men. Women and girls were not forbidden in synagogue but were held to the back. Houses were small but always had a guest room—even tents had guest rooms. Animals often housed under or near house—often goats and sheep come into the city at night. A farm would be the size of 4-6 acres. Most families kept a goat or two to milk, a few sheep for wool, and one or two donkeys or oxen as draft animals. Chickens or other fowl were in the courtyard.

Cloth Weaving: Linen and woolen cloth developed very early. Among Jews, woolen cloth was the norm. After the wool from the sheep had been washed, it was combed so as to prepare it for spinning. Spinning was done by using a wooden stick or spindle that had a notch or hook at one end. The other end was weighted with a heavy stone with a hole through its center,

called a whorl. The whorl was made of clay, stone, or bone and gave the stick momentum when it was given a spin. The spinner pulled out some strands of wool from the combed wool held under her left arm and attached the strands to the notch or hook. She then gave the spindle a twist and let it fall until it nearly reached the ground. In falling and twisting the spindle had pulled out a woolen thread that was then wound around the stick before the process was repeated again and again. Although natural colors were used in weaving, it was possible to dye the thread. The yarn was cleaned with nitre and soap before dyeing.

Scarlet dye was made from lice eggs that had been ground into powder. Indigo was obtained from pomegranate rind. Purple was obtained from the murex shellfish. The shells were crushed, cooked in salt, and left in the sun so that the secretion would turn purple. Blue was also made from the murex but another substance was added during the cooking. Yellow was made in Egypt from safflower, and the Romans extracted it from crocus flowers. The dyes were made by preparing a solution of water, potash, and lime. After two days the pigments were added and the dyeing was done in earthenware pots or in stone basins. The yarn or skin being dyed was then washed in clear water and hung up to dry.

The typical loom in Jesus' time produced cloth about three feet wide, so to make most clothing, two lengths of woven material had to be joined side by side to gain the proper width. In Galilee, however, looms were often wider, so that an article of clothing could be woven in one piece. In John 19:23 we read that Jesus' tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom. Over his tunic Jesus and other men wore a loose-fitting outer garment or mantle with fringes bound by blue ribbon. The woman wore the same type of tunic as the men, but her mantle was fuller, with enough fringe to cover her feet.

COINS OF THE TIMES: Roman coins-silver **denarius** (plural is denarii) was wages for 1 day of common labor. Greek coins-**drachma** is about the same as a denarius. Double drachma was used for paying the Temple tax. (No temple in Bethlehem) so this is why they would need money changers.

Jewish coin- **lepta** (translated the same as mite) is small in value (fraction of a penny) It would take about 80 lepta to equal 1 denarius. **Shekel** is an Old Testament term and it is possible to be used as a weight of silver or gold (4-5 oz). Herod had his own coins too. In Old Testament times people bought either by exchanging goods or by paying an agreed weight of silver or gold, for instance, a shekel is a weight, not a unit of currency. **Talent** was equal to 3,000 shekels.

Conversations:

Introduce yourself. Ask where they are from. Occupation? For such a large family you will need provisions for the journey home.

Tell me about your product. Much skill and time went into making yarn and weaving. Asking price should be high.

Are you in need of blankets and bedrolls? We have some beautiful yarns for sale also. Tell of the dyes. This is the best red I have made in the past year. Would you like to buy some to add to your weaving?

Time filler: Have you been counted or paid your taxes yet. Our family went early today. The Romans are asking for way too much for taxes. How are the Roman soldiers treating you? What have you seen on your travels? Do you still have many relatives in Bethlehem? Have you found a place to stay? (Remember your guest room is filled.) They can pick up their purchases in the morning.