

SWADDLED

"Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes." Luke 2:12. Upon hearing the word "swaddled", many people over the years have thought that it simply referred to a baby being bundled up in a blanket or other fabric. In reality, swaddling means more than just a baby being wrapped up, especially to Jews of old times.

When a child was born to Semitic people, the newborn was not clothed, but swaddled. The word "clothes" appears in our English versions, however, this can be misleading to novice scholars of the Bible. **"And she brought forth her first born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger ... And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."** Luke 2:7, 12. Instead of "clothes" the previous verses should have read "swaddling band" just as it is referred to in Job 38:9: **"When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddlingband for it..."** So what was a swaddling band? It was made from linen or cotton material and was five to six yards (15 to 18 feet) long while the width of the band was from four to five inches. Salt was pulverized in a stone mortar, probably by a mid-wife. It was crushed until the salt was in the form of a fine powder. There are a few writings that state swaddled babies were also sprinkled with powder made from the leaves of the myrtle tree. The leaves of a myrtle tree were green and shiny and the flowers were snow white and bordered by purple; as for the aroma, it was said that it emitted a perfume more exquisite than that of the rose.

When an infant was born, it was attended by a mid-wife who first washed the baby in water, then a piece of cloth about a square yard was laid out and the baby would be placed on the cloth in a diagonal position. The infant's body was sprinkled and gently rubbed with the finely powdered salt. Swaddled infants did not have the free movement of their limbs. The legs were put close together and then the infant's arms were put at its sides and the piece of swaddling cloth was folded over the baby's feet and arms. The band of cloth was then wrapped from under the infant's chin, over the forehead and wrapped around and around the infant right down to its ankles. Once finished being wrapped, the infant had the appearance of a mummy.

In regard to Joseph, several things have been said of him by different churches. Some believe that Joseph was not the legitimate husband of Mary and that he lived with her in celibacy. Others say Joseph was a step-father and that Jesus' brothers and sisters were from an earlier marriage of Joseph. From the book *"The Syrian Christ"* by Abraham Mitre Rihbany, the following was written on the topic of swaddling: **"And in describing such oriental customs it may be significant to point out that in certain localities in Syria, to say to a person that he was "not salted" upon birth is to invite trouble, only a "benduq" (bastard, that is, an illegitimate child) or the child of an unrecognized father is so neglected."** In the case of Jesus, his father was known (ie. Joseph), which is why Jesus was swaddled according to oriental custom, thus, signifying he was a legitimate child. **"And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary."** Matthew 1:16a; **"Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing."** Luke 2:48a; **"Is not this the carpenter's son?"** Matthew 13:55a.

We have further evidence that the custom of swaddling as described in *"The Syrian Christ"* was accurate. Read Ezekiel 16:2, 4, 5: **"Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations ... And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple [cleanse] thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born."** Israel and Jerusalem in the days of Ezekiel were in abominations of various sorts and thus, symbolically, were considered as having no father given their disobedience to God. This biblical passage gives us insight into what swaddling meant to the Jews. Joseph was known to be the father of Jesus, thus, Jesus was swaddled according

to the custom where an infant is born to parents that are known.

Hopefully when we read the passages in the Bible pertaining to Jesus being swaddled, its significance is understood and we no longer just picture a baby wrapped in linen. If there was any doubt that Joseph was the father of Jesus, the baby Jesus would not have been swaddled.