

OCTAVIAN BIRTH STORIES

Octavian of whom it was said by the ancients was born under the most amazing circumstances. Some have said that it was the most amazing birth story ever told. This birth narrative heralded the arrival of a child who was praised as the Son of God, the Savior of the World who was said to be the personification of peace on earth; God incarnate; fully divine and fully human. Octavian also known as Augustus Caesar, Augustus in Latin, meaning one who should be praised or worshiped, and Caesar meaning Emperor. The legends surrounding this praiseworthy emperor are truly astounding.^[1]



The imperial secretary, Suetonius, recorded the following: "According to Julius Marathus, a few months before Augustus was born a portent was generally observed at Rome, which gave warning that nature was pregnant with a king for the Roman people; thereupon the senate in consternation decreed that no male child born that year should be reared; but those whose wives were with child saw to it that the decree was not filed in the treasury, since each one appropriated the prediction to his own family.

I have read the following story in the books of Asclepias of Mendes entitled *Theologumena*. When Atia had come in the middle of the night to the solemn service of Apollo, she had her litter set down in the temple and fell asleep, while the rest of the matrons also slept. On a sudden a serpent glided up to her and shortly went away. When she awoke, she purified herself, as if after the embraces of her husband, and at once there appeared on her body a mark in colours like a serpent, and she could never get rid of it [...]. In the tenth month after that Augustus was born and was therefore regarded as the son of Apollo. Atia too, before she gave him birth, dreamed that her vitals were borne up to the stars and spread over the whole extent of land and sea, while Octavius dreamed that the sun rose from Atia's womb."^[2] When the priests were consulted it was decreed that little Octavian must be the progeny of a god.

The poet Virgil gives us a pretty clear indication of just who Augustus was in the eyes of his people. For it seems that on the very night that Augustus Caesar was made Emperor a strange star appeared in the sky. When Romans described the appearance of the star in the sky they said, "We saw the son of God, (Julius Caesar) ascending to the right hand of God the father Zeus." The people believed that this was a sign that Julius Caesar's spirit, leaving

Rome and heading off into the heavens, was blessing the reign of his great-nephew as he went by displaying a magnificent star in the sky.

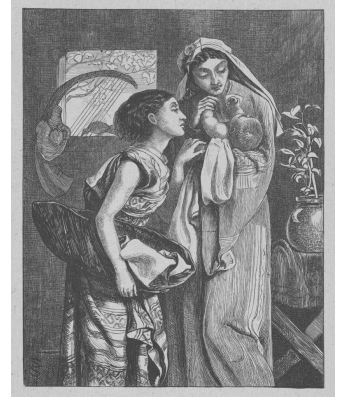
Writing of Augustus' actual birth, Virgil's poem insists that, Augustus would be a divine king, the one the world had been waiting for, the one who would bring salvation to all the earth, freeing the people from fear and establishing a universal empire of peace. It was just as Virgil said: "Caesar is the Son of God. Salvation is to be found in none other save Augustus. Augustus is reigning in the fullness of his glory, the entire empire resounds with the sound of the advent proclamation." Such an august man/god as this requires a birth narrative that heralds the arrival of the Savior of the world.^[3]



MOSES BIRTH STORIES

Pharaoh's Dream

"And Pharaoh said that while he slept, he saw in his dream that all the land of Egypt was placed on one balance of a weighing scale, and a lamb, the young of a ewe, on the other balance of the weighing scale; and the balance of the weighing scale on which the lamb was placed weighed down. Immediately he sent and summoned all the magicians of Egypt and told them his dream. Immediately Jannes and Jambres, the chief magicians, opened their mouths and said to Pharaoh: 'A son is to be born in the assembly of Israel, through whom all the land of Egypt is destined to be destroyed.'" ^[4]



Moses' Parents, Jochebed and Amram

Exodus 2 tells of the birth of Moses. Verse 1 begins with the marriage of Jochebed and Amram, and then the reader is immediately told of Moses's birth, concealment and rescue. This sequence omits a lengthy period of time, for Jochebed and Amram already had two other children (Aaron and Miriam) when Moses was born. The Torah seemingly chose to concentrate on the birth of Israel's deliverer, and therefore did not mention his two elder siblings. The Rabbis resolve this abbreviated chronology by stating that Jochebed and Amram divorced, and Exodus 2:1 portrays their remarriage.

According to this tradition, Amram was the leading scholar of the generation. When he divorced his wife, all the men of Israel also divorced their wives. Miriam, who was six years old at the time, said: "Father, father, your decree is harsher than that of Pharaoh. Pharaoh only decreed against the males, but you have decreed against both the males and the females." Amram heeded his daughter, and returned to his wife, whom he remarried as did all the rest of Israel. ^[5]



[1][3] The Rev. Dawn Hutchings, *The Greatest Birth Story Ever?*.

pastordawn.com/2014/12/15/the-greatest-birth-story-ever-luke-126-38-a-sermon-for-advent-4b/

[2] C. Suetonius Tranquillus, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*. Published in the Loeb Classical Library, 1913

[4] Targum Jonathan on Exodus. Translated by: John Wesley Etheridge, London, 1862. Talmudic Israel, c.30-c.70 CE. www.sefaria.org/Targum_Jonathan_on_Exodus_1:15.

[5] Targum Jonathan on Exodus. Translated by: John Wesley Etheridge, London, 1862. Talmudic Israel, c.30 – c.70 CE. www.sefaria.org/Targum_Jonathan_on_Exodus.2.2