

The Birth of Jesus

Luke 2:1 And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

A decree from Caesar Augustus. Augustus was the grandnephew of Julius Caesar, and was adopted as his son. After the murder of Julius Caesar, young Octavius Augustus ruled with Mark Anthony and Lepidus in a triumvirate. Then for more than forty years, from 27 b.c. to a.d. 14, Augustus served by himself as the first emperor of the Roman Empire. It was during his reign that Christ was born.

All the world indicates only the twenty-seven provinces ruled by the Roman Senate and the emperor. Taxed (Gr apographō), better translated as enrolled, signifies a census, upon which basis perhaps a future taxation would be made.

Luke 2:2 This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria.

Syria was the most important of all the Roman provinces, and Quirinius (Cyrenius) served in several capacities there at different times. Roman censuses came every fourteen years. The first one of which we have recorded knowledge came in a.d. 6. This earlier census then may have been set in motion in Rome about 8 b.c., while Quirinius was the military governor of Syria. Several years would be required to complete such a census.

Luke 2:3 So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. :4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, :5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. :6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.

Joseph had to travel from Nazareth, where he was living, to Beth-lehem for the census, because he was a descendant of King David of Beth-lehem. Mary accompanied Joseph on the sixty-five-mile journey.

Luke 2:7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

With no midwife to help, Mary wrapped baby Jesus in long bands of cloth such as were used in wrapping the bodies of the dead.

That He was born to die is perhaps intimated here and in the later gift of myrrh from the wise men (Mt 2:11). Manger is a cattle-feeding trough. No room for them in the inn. All these things suggest poverty, loneliness, and even rejection (see 2 Cor 8:9).

The exact date and place are not recorded by Luke, perhaps to guard against the vain worship which men often attach to such information.

Luke 2:8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

The first intimation of this unique birth was not given to the religious leaders in Jerusalem, but to contemplative shepherds on Judean hillsides, humble men who were faithful at their regular work.

James S. Stewart observes: And is there not a world of meaning in the fact that it was very ordinary people, busy about very ordinary tasks, whose eyes first saw the glory of the coming of the Lord? It means, first, that the place of duty, however humble, is the place of vision.

And it means, second, that it is the men who have kept to the deep, simple pieties of life and have not lost the child heart to whom the gates of the Kingdom most readily open.

Luke 2:9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

Luke 2:10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

Luke 2:11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

How would the shepherds recognize Him? The angels gave them a twofold sign. First the Baby would be wrapped in swaddling cloths. They had seen babies in swaddling cloths before. But the angels had just announced that this Baby was the Lord. No one had ever seen the Lord as a little Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths.

The second part of the sign was that He would be lying in a manger. It is doubtful that the shepherds had ever seen a baby in such an unlikely place.

This indignity was reserved for the Lord of life and glory when He came into our world. It makes our minds dizzy to think of the Creator and Sustainer of the universe entering human history not as a conquering military hero, but as a little Babe. Yet this is the truth of the Incarnation. What can we learn from this?

Luke 2:13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: :14 “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

Suddenly heaven’s pent-up ecstasy broke forth. A multitude of the heavenly host appeared, praising God.

Their song, known generally today by the title, Gloria in Excelsis Deo, catches up the full significance of the birth of the Baby. His life and ministry would bring glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth, good will toward men, or perhaps to men in whom He is well-pleased.

The men in whom God is well-pleased are those who repent of their sins and receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Luke 2:15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.”

Luke 2:16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.

Luke 2:17 Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. :18 And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. :19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

As soon as the angels departed, the shepherds hurried to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and Jesus lying in a manger. They gave a complete report of the angel’s visit, causing considerable surprise among those who had gathered in the stable. But Mary had a deeper understanding of what was going on; she treasured all these things, and knowingly pondered them in her heart.

Luke 2:20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

The shepherds returned to their flocks, overjoyed at all they had heard and seen, and overflowing in their worship of God. How can we apply this to our lives?

Luke 2:21 And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

This took place when He was eight days old. It was a token of the covenant that God made with Abraham. On this same day, the Child was named, according to Jewish custom. The angel had previously instructed Mary and Joseph to call Him JESUS.

Luke 2:22 Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord :23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male