

The Savior Is Born

Luke 2:1-7

Introduction

In Luke's gospel Jesus is presented as the compassionate Son of Man who comes to seek and save the lost (19:10). Jesus is born in a world dominated by Rome. The Emperor has the ability to make a decision and the inhabitants of that world will march in one direction or another. Even though Jesus is born into a Roman world it was a Jewish universe. Long before the rise of the Roman Empire and long after its demise; the God of Heaven planned and purposed and prepared and sent a Savior to this world. Luke's genealogy of Jesus goes all the way back to Adam (3:38) and the whole world is seen as the sphere where God must work His plan of redemption (2:14,32; 3:6).

Luke is concerned about sinners. He uses the word 16 times. More than any other gospel writer Luke mentions women and children. And Luke gives us the most detailed account of the Savior's birth! That won't be a surprise to most considering Luke's profession as a physician. The chapter features the advent (vv.1-7); and the announcement (vv.8-20); and the adoration of the angels (vv.21-40). Our focus will be on the advent of Jesus (vv.1-7).

I read an interesting survey done by LifeWay Research. It revealed that most Americans want more religious meaning in the Christmas Season; 65% say Christmas should be more about Jesus." That survey is remarkable for several reasons. A similar survey done by the same firm in 2014 found that 79% of Americans said that the Christmas Season should be more about Jesus. What is also interesting is the percentage of people who disagreed with the statement; "Christmas should be more about Jesus." In both 2014 and 2018 the numbers hardly changed. In 2014 18% disagreed and in 2018 19% disagreed. The remarkable shift came from those who were unsure how to even answer the question. Those who were unsure jumped from 3% to 16% today. Scott McConnell the Executive Director of LifeWay Research noted: "Saying Christmas should be more about Jesus is a little like saying Thanksgiving should be more about giving thanks. It's in the name of the holiday. Yet it appears there is less cultural expectation for celebrations of the Christmas Holiday to include the religious aspect."

Expectation.

We live in a world that can be broadly broken down into three categories: those who believe the Messiah has come; those who believe the Messiah will come; and those who struggle to hold on to any kind of hope.

The Decree By Caesar (vv.1-3)

Luke 2:1-3 (NKJV) 1And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

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

3So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

The Savior Is Born

Luke 2:1-7

The Messiah must have a birthplace. The narrative of the Bible includes three continents; Asia, Africa and Europe. Asia was chosen by God. But Asia comprised many languages and people groups. The ancient Roman province of Syria included the districts known as the Galilee; Samaria and Judaea. Judaea was the elect province but even in that province there were many tiny towns and villages. But one small village had been set aside by God.

The decree by Caesar Augustus made it necessary for the couple to travel at a most inopportune time.

Some scholars are disturbed by the fact that we have no historical evidence for this specific census. They will not allow Luke's record to stand on its own merit.

We have ample evidence that Augustus reorganized the administration of the Empire and conducted numerous local censuses.

Caesar Augustus was born Gaius Octavius in 63 B.C. (known as Octavian). He was the grand-nephew of Julius Caesar who was murdered in 44 B.C. Caesar adopted Octavian as his son. After the death of Caesar Octavian joined two others in what was called the Triumvirate or Board of Three. Marcus Leius and Mark Anthony. A civil war broke out between Mark Antony and Octavian. Antony allied himself with Cleopatra of Egypt and combined their forces—only to be defeated by Octavian at the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C. Octavian conquered Egypt the following year and Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide. The Roman Senate recognized the supremacy of Octavian and bestowed upon him the title Augustus (exalted or venerable).

Luke may be making reference to an otherwise unknown census, or he may be treating the provincial census undertaken by Quirinius as part of a larger Roman administrative policy. We have evidence that Quirinius served as Governor of Syria from about 6AD to 7 AD and that a census was conducted in Judea around 6 AD. This particular census and the revolt that followed are mentioned by Luke in Acts 5:37. The present problem is this places the census about ten years to late in reference to this account. The birth of Jesus was prior to the death of Herod which is firmly established in history at 4 B.C. (see Matthew 2:1-19; Luke 1:5). Several different solutions have been offered; including inscriptional evidence that Quirinius may have been Governor twice; first in 10-7 BC and then again in 6-9 AD. Others suggest that Quirinius held a broad Administrative Posting that included much of the Middle East; and it was at this time that the census began. The actual Greek text reads; "while Quirinius was governing (or had charge over) Syria". Another possibility is that Quirinius was completing a census that the previous governor began but had failed to complete. In all three proposals Quirinius would oversee and complete the census imposed by Caesar upon Herod's territory.

Luke provides specific details. It is well known that the Romans often used a census or a registrations to aid in military conscription or taxation. Jews were exempt from military duty but

The Savior Is Born

Luke 2:1-7

were not exempt from Roman tax obligations. This decree forced Joseph and Mary to make the journey from Nazareth in the Galilee to both Joseph and Mary's ancestral home.

Why does Luke include this information?

The birth of Jesus is rooted in history.

The Lord would use this special event to fulfill his plan for the birth of the Messiah.

The Lord would use this special event to move Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem.

The Lord would use this special event to fulfill very specific prophecies.

Politicians tax people. There is nothing unusual or miraculous about Governments taxing subjects.

The prophecies given in the past by the prophets included certain well known facts. The Messiah would be a Jew; a descendant of Judah and David. The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

The Apostle Paul may have served as partial inspiration for Luke's stunning narrative. In the book of Galatians Paul mentions how Jews were slaves to the Law; how in their zeal to keep the Law and honor the Law they became slaves of the Law (4:3). ". . . *But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent Him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children*" (vv.4-5 NLT).

God sent Jesus at just the right time. A hundred years earlier would have been too soon. A hundred years later would have been too late.

The Lord sent Jesus at the right time; best time; on time.

Scores of prophecies were about to be fulfilled.

The Lord is in charge of history and prophecy. The Lord is in charge of kings and servants.

The Descendants Of David (vv.4-5)

*4Joseph 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,
5to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.*

The Greek term *polis* (v.4) can mean city or town or village. Bethlehem means "house of bread". The little town of Bethlehem is located about five miles south of Jerusalem. The Bible lists Bethlehem as both the birthplace and home of David.

(v.5) to be registered with Mary his "pledged" wife, who was with child. In chapter 1:27 we read "to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary." The word translated virgin *parthenos*-means young, unmarried and normally indicates virginity. In that culture a young girl could be pledged or engaged as young as 12-14.

The Savior Is Born

Luke 2:1-7

A formal contract was drawn between parents and could only be broken by a legal divorce. Infidelity would be treated as adultery. The young woman would live with parents until the actual marriage ceremony took place about a year later.

Was Mary legally married to Joseph at the time of the conception and birth of the Child? The answer is yes. However the actual consummation of the marriage did not take place until after the birth of Jesus.

Matthew (2:6) reminds us that Micah 5:2 predicts that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and be greater than David.

The Delivery Of The Child (vv.6-7)

*6So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.
7And 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.*

The due date—established in eternity past; predicted and prophesied arrived. The days were completed for her to be delivered.

A trendy Hollywood maternity shop received this note from a celebrity client; “Dear Sir, You have not yet delivered that maternity dress I ordered. Please cancel the order. My delivery was faster than yours.”

You have heard the expression; “A picture is worth a thousand words.” But the words of verse 7 conjure a thousand pictures.

The first picture of the Savior in Luke’s gospel is as a baby; wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. The description is one of utter helplessness and humility. The passage reeks of poverty and inconvenience.

Joseph and Mary do not have health insurance. They don’t even have adequate housing. Luke simply states that the cave and the manger was the only option “*because there was no room for them in the inn.*”

The word translated inn (*katalyma*) does not mean hotel or motel or even bread and breakfast. It was a word that would normally apply to a guest room in a private residence or an informal caravansary where travelers would gather for the night (think KOA campground—but no camper or car).

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan Luke (10:34) uses an entirely different word for a public inn (*pandocheion*).

The Savior Is Born

Luke 2:1-7

The same decree that drove Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem must have sent thousands more to the tiny village. How many people claimed descent from David?

We learn from Matthew's account that wise men will come months later and we still find Mary and Joseph in the City of David but in a home. In the brutal slaughter of the innocents were are left with the impression that wicked King Herod destroyed all the babies in the tiny village to insure that he could eliminate royal competition and retain rule of his tiny kingdom of Judea.

In that simple statement of "no room" we have a type and a picture of a world full of sin and selfishness, greed and unkindness. How is it possible to live in a world so consumed with its own problems and affairs that a poor pregnant woman and her husband far from home receive no support? Let's give the hospitality industry of Bethlehem the benefit of the doubt for just a moment.

Thousands of pilgrims. Hundreds of rooms. How do we make decisions?

I read another story of a pilgrim in the past. It was the fall of 1797; the manager of Baltimore's largest hotel refused lodging to a man dressed like a farmer. He thought his lowly appearance would discredit his inn. So the man left and took a room elsewhere. Later the innkeeper discovered that he had turned away none other than the Vice-President of the United States Thomas Jefferson. Immediately he sent a note to the famed patriot asking him to return and be his guest. Jefferson replied by instructing the messenger as follows: "Tell him I have already engaged a room. I value his good intentions highly, but if he has no place for a dirty American farmer, he has more for the Vice President of the United States."

The makeshift bassinet is an animal's feeding trough.

The description Luke gives was never meant to inspire curious Christmas cards or timeless and endless Nativity scenes. We are supposed to be shocked!

The Savior is born in poverty, humility; absent the most fundamental hospitalities that are usually present in the ancient world of the Middle East. We are left with the impression that the delivery of the baby was in isolation with perhaps no help. She brought forth her firstborn Son. She wrapped Him in swaddling clothes.

Bethlehem is dotted with limestone caves that were often used to shelter animals in the night. According to tradition it was in one of these caves with a manger hewn out of the rock that Mary placed her Child.

The Savior Is Born

Luke 2:1-7

This tiny, vulnerable at risk child will grow up and become the central figure in all of human history.

The Bible's revelation of this child incorporates all of The Child's past and earthly ministry and future destiny.

Royal babies are usually born in royal circumstances.

This baby will grow up and live the most remarkable life ever lived. He will die a most painful death. He will come back to life. He will ascend into Heaven. He will return and judge the living the dead. This Jesus will rule the world and make decisions about each and every one of you.

Our first glimpse of the Savior by Luke may be in a manger. But it will not be our last picture. We are invited to picture the circumstances of our Savior's birth in humility and poverty but please don't leave our Lord in the feeding trough.

And there's the paradox. This Jesus born in humility and poverty and vulnerability grows and gains unprecedented glory.

Did you know that about 3.8 million babies were born in the United States last year.

Someone gave this definition of a baby: "A baby is a small member of the home that makes love stronger, days shorter, nights longer, the bank roll smaller, the home happier, clothes shabbier, the past forgotten, and the future worth living for."

Have you allowed Jesus to grow up and live and die and come back to life and ascend into Heaven? Has the resurrected and ascended Lord been given supreme control of your life? Do you wait in earnest expectation for His soon coming? Do you live every moment of your life in light of His life and supreme majesty?

Conclusion