

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

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

2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

7 And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the

Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

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, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17 And when they had seen *it*, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

NOTES

The Birth of the Saviour

(Christmas)

Lesson Text: Luke 2:1-17

Related Scriptures: Psalm 96:1-13; Isaiah 9:6-7; Micah 5:2-4;
Isaiah 60:1-4; Galatians 4:4-7

PLACES: Nazareth and Bethlehem

TIME: 6 or 5 B.C.

GOLDEN TEXT—"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

Lesson Exposition

JESUS BORN IN BETHLEHEM— Luke 2:1-7

Caesar's decree (Luke 2:1-2). Caesar Augustus was born Gaius Octavius. He was the grandnephew of Julius Caesar, who adopted Gaius. He received the name Caesar from Julius and later received the title Augustus (meaning worthy of reverence).

Caesar Augustus reigned as emperor of the Roman Empire from 27 B.C. to A.D. 14. Researchers say he ordered three censuses during his reign.

Skeptics say Luke's account cannot be accurate, for Quirinius was not governor until A.D. 6. However, the Greek word translated "first" can also be translated "prior." This would mean the census took place prior to when Quirinius governed Syria. Biblical scholars agree that there is evidence a census happened at the time of Jesus' birth. We know, of course, that this is true, for the Holy Spirit inspired Luke's writings.

Skeptics always attack God's Word. That is what Satan did in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1-5).

People worshipped Caesar Augustus as a god, and he thought he was in control. But we know that the true and living God chose the time when the Messiah would be born. He is the One truly in control.

Joseph and Mary's trip (Luke 2:3-4). It was common for people to be registered in their ancestral towns. God was making sure Jesus would be born in Bethlehem of Judea, as Micah had prophesied hundreds of years earlier (Mic. 5:2).

There were two towns named Bethlehem. Adding Ephratah identified the Bethlehem in Judah. In fact, the names Bethlehem and Ephratah may have come from the family of Judah and David through Caleb. "These were the sons of Caleb the son of Hur, the firstborn of Ephratah; Shobal the father of Kirjath-jearim, Salma the father of Bethlehem, Hareph the father of Beth-gader" (1 Chr. 2:50-51). People still name towns and streets after those who live (or have lived) there. Bethlehem had strong ties to this family.

The town of Bethlehem is about five miles south of Jerusalem. Jacob's wife

Rachel was buried there (Gen. 35:19). Boaz and Ruth were married there, and David's grandfather Obed was born there (Ruth 4:17; cf. 1:22). David was born and anointed as king of Israel in Bethlehem (I Sam. 16:1-13).

Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, as was prophesied (Gen. 49:10). He was from the line of David (Luke 3:23-38). He was in line for the throne as the legal son of Joseph (Matt. 1:1-17).

God's timing (Luke 2:5-6). We see Mary as nine-months pregnant during the eighty-mile trip to Bethlehem, but the Bible only says she was "great with child."

"It is possible that they went down during her last trimester of pregnancy, when the social relationships in Nazareth would have grown more difficult. They may have stayed in a crowded room in the home of some poor relative till the birth of the baby necessitated their vacating it for privacy and more space" (Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan).

The Holy Spirit did not tell us those details about the trip, so the exact circumstances remain uncertain.

Jesus' birth (Luke 2:7). Mary bore her "firstborn son." This indicates that she had other children after she and Joseph consummated their marriage (cf. Matt. 13:55-56).

Mary wrapped Jesus in swaddling clothes. These were strips of cloth tied together and wrapped around a new baby. For a baby used to the tight confines of the womb, the rather tight wrapping would seem familiar. This also kept the baby warm and helped his legs grow straight. Newborn babies seem to sleep better when wrapped this way. This showed Mary's care for Jesus.

The Greek word translated "manger" in Luke 2:7 is translated "stall" in 13:15. The manger "denotes the ledge or

projection in the end of the room used as a stall" (www.christiananswers.net). It could have been a trough, but it was probably not the small wooden manger we traditionally see portrayed. We know it was a place where animals were fed.

Joseph and Mary definitely took shelter in a place that usually housed animals. Some believe it was a cave. Others see it as part of a house. In many cultures, animals still sleep and eat on the bottom floor of houses.

In Luke 2:7 the word translated "inn" is translated "guestchamber" in 22:11. Luke used a different Greek word for an "inn" where travelers stayed (10:34).

Jesus probably was not born in a stable such as we see portrayed in traditional nativity scenes. People in that time and place did not build such structures.

AN ANGEL ANNOUNCED JESUS' BIRTH—Luke 2:8-14

An angel visited shepherds (Luke 2:8-9). Shepherds watched for animals that would attack the sheep in the dark. When the glory of the Lord shone, it dispelled darkness. This was a physical picture of the spiritual situation in which Jesus, the Light of the World, conquered darkness.

The glory of God had shown in the tabernacle many years earlier; it had dwelled in the temple's Holy of Holies. Now the glory of God indwelt the tiny body of Jesus, though flesh veiled it.

David was tending sheep in an area close to Bethlehem when Samuel called him to become Israel's king (I Sam. 16:11-13). God's messenger spoke to shepherds tending sheep near Bethlehem at the birth of the true King, whom David had foreshadowed.

The glory of the Lord daunted the rough and tough shepherds.

The angel told of the Saviour's birth (Luke 2:10-11). The Jewish people sought a Saviour for the Jewish people, yet God had a better plan. The good news and great joy would be for all people. God is not limited. Two thousand years later, His good news still brings joy to the hearts of those who trust Him.

Sometimes we seek less than God has for us. Let us not limit Him by our low expectations. Instead, let us trust His plan.

The angel made it clear that the Baby would be the Saviour, the Christ (Messiah), and the Lord (Master).

The angel identified Jesus (Luke 2:12). How many newborn babies would the shepherds find in the small town of Bethlehem? How many babies would they find wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger? These circumstances would clearly set Him apart.

Multitudes praised God (Luke 2:13-14). What an amazing plan God developed! No mere man could have dreamed up such an awesome idea. God Himself came to earth in human flesh to take away our sins and redeem us. Though His loving plan is clear today, we still have a problem comprehending it.

The heavenly host saw God's grace and mercy in action, and they could not stand silent. They praised God, and the shepherds heard it.

Jesus laid aside His glory for a season and a reason, and the angels could not help proclaiming it.

Through trust in Jesus comes the only peace that does not depend on circumstances—the only peace that is permanent. When Jesus presented Himself as King, His disciples praised God, saying, "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest" (19:38).

SHEPHERDS FOUND JESUS— Luke 2:15-17

The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem (Luke 2:15-16). After hearing the angel's announcement, the priorities of the shepherds changed. Nothing was more important than hurrying to Bethlehem to see the Infant and worship Him.

Is being with Jesus our highest priority? What could be more important?

The shepherds shared the good news (Luke 2:17). The shepherds did not keep the good news to themselves. They became the first to spread it.

How can we keep silent? The Light has come—the hope of the world. Glory to God in the highest!

—Arlene Knickerbocker.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Caesar Augustus thought he was in control, but it is God who is in control (Luke 2:1-3).
2. Jesus was the legal Heir to David's throne. He also is the rightful Ruler of our lives (vss. 4-5).
3. God did not value earthly prestige or position. Let us value only what He values (vss. 6-7).
4. Good news should be a cause for rejoicing rather than a reason to fear (vss. 8-10).
5. God made sure the shepherds would find Jesus; He leads us to Him too (vss. 11-12).
6. The heavenly host glorified God, and we should use our voices to glorify Him as well (vss. 13-14).
7. The shepherds put Jesus as their top priority. He should be the center of our lives (vss. 15-17).

—Arlene Knickerbocker.