**12-15-19 - IT’S ALMOST TIME**

*“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.”*

LUKE 2:1-6

**Carrying a child……………………………………………………………………………**

Surprisingly to me during my research of this message, the birth of Jesus is scarcely mentioned in the bible. Several of the prophets foretell of the birth, but don’t get into the details. The gospels according to Mark and John don’t mention this important part of our belief at all. Matthew provides a few details covering the birth, but Dr Luke is the only gospel writer who covers the birth itself. Luke gives us a story from the birth of John to his cousin Jesus Christ. He gives us inside information of the key players God selected to be part of this historic biblical event. That’s why he writes, “many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.” In essence, this is part of the greatest story ever told. Of course, the other part of the story is the death and resurrection, but we would never get to that portion if there were never the birth of the Baby Jesus. So, as we begin our story, it starts with the taxing or census as a painful reminder that the Jewish people were under the rule of a pagan power. Reverend what is “pagan power?” **Pagans** focus on spirituality and nature, rather than on doctrine. The word **pagan** (without a capital P) is often used to describe anyone who holds religious beliefs that differ from the main world religions. A similar term to describe pagans are heathens. But it begins with, “in those days Caesar Augustus sent out a decree that all the world should be taxed. Yet Joseph and Mary head to Bethlehem the place where the prophets Isaiah and Micah had long ago predicted the Jewish Messiah would be born. “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, a baby boy, one who will be known as the lily of the valley, bright and Morningstar, the great I am, and they shall call His name Immanuel, why, for He shall save His people from their sins. Can I get a witness? **The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem is more than sixty (60) miles and would have taken at least 3 days to arrive.** So the text begins with Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, who was with child. Throughout our land occurrences will be observed where in both major cities and in smaller towns, streets that are normally filled with traffic and sidewalks that normally bustle with pedestrians will be empty. Drivers in any major city will not experience delays. There’ll be no jostling on the sidewalks of any of the great cities of the land. Stores that are normally filled with shoppers will be closed. No clerks will be available to serve you. Except for those engaged in emergency response of one type of another, people that are normally busy tending to all the affairs within the nation will not be working. Families with small children will be wakened earlier than any other day of the year; parents will be forced to get out of bed as the shrill voices of their children exhort them to hurry. This is the continuing impact of an event that happened almost two thousand years ago as we still continue to forget who is the real reason for the season. Can I get a witness? There was “something” significant going on, and that “something” was the birth of a child; but it was no ordinary child. An old man seeing the child for the first time blessed the mother and then prophesied, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed” [LUKE 2:34-35]. This child was born to die, but His death would accomplish far more than the death of any mere mortal. I would hope that all of us should meditate on that Child’s birth. That is, after all, what Christmas is about. Not all the commercialism but the birth of our soon coming king. Can I get a witness? In the midst of political insurrection in those days, a young man, barely more than a boy by contemporary criteria, together with his wife to whom he was betrothed, were compelled to make the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a distance of some one hundred fifty kilometers. The young couple would have been inconvenienced, but rulers are seldom concerned for the impact of their edicts on those whom they see as “subjects.” The journey would have taken time, time that was costing the young man because he would need to pay for the trip, and he would be unable to work while he was away. The journey was no doubt made more difficult by the fact that his wife was pregnant. Powerful rulers and those in authority who imagine they are doing what they want to do, seldom realizing that there is a God who rules over the world and also overrules the world. Caesar Augustus no doubt thought that he was generating the means by which to maintain the empire, never aware that God was engineering the entire taxation event to move one family to an insignificant town just outside of Jerusalem. There, the child, the baby Jesus conceived by the Holy Spirit, would be born. Can I get a witness? It was necessary that the child should be born in Bethlehem, because the Lord God had sent a prophet declaring that this would be the case many years before. Micah wrote in 5:2, “The child could not be born in Nazareth, though He would grow up in Nazareth so that He would be called a Nazarene. He could not be born in Jerusalem, for though it was the capital of the nation, the child must be born in the City of David, in Bethlehem. The circumstances, and the necessity of travelling to the city of his birth, ensured that Joseph, together with his pregnant fiancée, would be in the city at the time of the birth of this child. What may not have been foreseen was the lack of accommodations for the young couple. There was no place available for the baby Jesus. Just to set the scene, the village was crowded with people coming to be enrolled for taxation, and bureaucrats are seldom in a hurry to do their work. It takes time to collect money from people. The process includes they must be registered, checked against the records and then the money received. There would have been the usual arguments as a tax collector demanded more money and as those who were taxed questioned the amounts they were assessed. This was done to ensure that the town would remain full of people for some time. And the teenage girl Mary didn’t have the luxury of waiting. The baby would enter into the world on his schedule and not on the young girl’s timetable. So, the text reads, “While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. Somebody say, ” It’s Almost Time” Unwelcomed in a world that was busy with the business of the empire, they found a place where they might have a little privacy. It was a cave in which sheep had been housed for centuries. The floor was no doubt covered with a variety of unwanted things not suitable for a labor and delivery room especially one that was about to be delivery room for the baby Jesus. There was no midwife to assist in the birth, no parents to console Mary as labor pains began, just a teenage boy who couldn’t have been well-versed in the art and science of home delivery of children. It was as if God deliberately chose the humblest circumstance imaginable to bring His Son into the world. Can I get a witness? Here is Joseph and Mary and no guest room is available for the holy family on the night that Christ was born, and there seems to be no room for the Son of God today. Our failure to provide a place for the Son of God accounts for why we are forced to put one masks to hide our loneliness. We post multiple statements on Facebook declaring our self-sufficiency, but our bravado is a monstrous lie. We tell friends that we are fine when they ask how we are doing, but we are living lives of quiet desperation.