



Luke 2:1-7

Christ is Born

God's eternal plan for world redemption was a perfectly synchronized program of events that centered on the Savior's birth in Bethlehem. When you examine the details you are overwhelmed with the fact that it was not an afterthought with God. It was a carefully laid organizational plan of complexity. The apostle Paul in Galatians 4:4-5 tells us "when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

It took place just at the right moment, precisely as God prearranged it. It was carefully planned and communicated through His spokesman to those who would be obedient to His Word. The Hebrew prophet Micah declared, 700 years before the coming of the Messiah that He would be born in Bethlehem, Judah in the ancient city of David. But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity (5:2).

Now seven hundred years later a teenage couple, descendants of King David, is living in Nazareth, Galilee, a few days journey away from Bethlehem. She is due any day now to give birth, and going to Bethlehem near Jerusalem is far from her mind. It has never entered her mind that she needs to go to Bethlehem. How can God get her to Bethlehem on time? God's timing is always perfect, but don't you think He is cutting this pretty close this time? However, if Jesus were born in Nazareth He would be an illegitimate messiah and impostor of the throne of the Holy One of Israel. It would have been impossible for Him to be our Savior and redeemer.

When you examine the details there is a unique set of historical circumstances that are significant and meaningful to fulfillment of prophecies related to the birth of Christ. For the observant person it is amazing how the sovereign hand of God brings it all together in perfect timing. He is the God of history, and He is in control of every detail.

I cease to be amazed at how God takes His time, yet His timing is always perfect. Sometimes we think He is dragging His feet, yet He knows with absolute perfection every detail of the events along the way and the people whom He chooses to use to accomplish His eternal purpose. How tragic that we get so busy with our plans, schedules, arrangements, and instant gratification that we fail to see His perfect timing.

CAESAR'S CENSUS (2:1-5)

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God's timing is always perfect. A sovereign God made ready a time and a people to fulfill His eternal purpose for the redemption of a lost mankind.

A time and place in history (vv. 1-2)

Jesus was born at a time and place in history. The event is simply told by the physician turned historian. It occurred in the days of Caesar Augustus. When Christ was born Palestine was under the reign of a Roman ruler, Caesar Augustus. The long hundred-year-old bloody civil war of Rome has finally come to an end. Dr. Luke is careful to give us historical details of Jesus' birth. It is no mythology or dream of fantasy. Augustus was the first Roman emperor to wear the imperial purple and crown as sole ruler of the vast empire. Caesar Augustus is the Emperor of Rome who ruled from 27 B.C. to A.D. 14. He was born Gaius Octavius in September 63 BC; we know him as Octavian. His father was related to Pompey and Julius Caesar is his grand uncle on his mother's side. Julius Caesar adopted him as his son and made him heir to the throne. When Augustus heard that Julius Caesar had been assassinated (44 BC), he returned to Rome to claim his inheritance. In time he carved out a period of political peace and prosperity. The Roman Empire was a safe place in which to live and travel. By the time of the birth of Jesus about 4 BC, the Roman Empire was at peace, efficiently administered and more prosperous than ever before.

Oddly enough, Caesar Augustus was never aware of his greatest and most lasting achievement which was preparing of the way for Savior of the world.

The King James reads, "that all the world should be taxed." A more accurate translation is, "Now it came about in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria (2:1-2). The census was a registration or enrollment of the people. The taxation would follow based on the census or registration. It was really a registration for taxing purposes. The census is for the registration of all citizens in the Roman Empire so the government could collect taxes in the near future. This was the first of regular censuses to follow every fourteen years.

The date is BC 4 or 5 and Herod the Great is king in Judaea (40-4 BC). These events took place probably shortly before Herod's death April 4 BC. Of Herod, the emperor Augustus once said, "I had sooner be Herod's swine than his son," referring to the increasingly paranoid and cruel execution of his wife and several sons.

Quirinius is the governor of Syria. In fact, he was probably governor twice and was involved in at least two censuses. Inscriptions discovered by Sir William Ramsay show he was "governor in Syria both before and after the birth of Jesus. The eminent archaeologist Jerry Vanderman found a coin with the name of Quirinius on it in small writing. This coin places him as proconsul of Syria and Cilicia from 11 BC until the death of Herod. The census would have taken place under the reign of Quirinius. The details of the census under Quirinius may have been common knowledge in Luke's time. It proves once again that Luke was a painstakingly accurate historian who carefully investigated in detail as he testified in Luke 1:1-4. One scholar

painstakingly accurate historian who carefully investigated in detail as he testified in Luke 1:1-4. One scholar wrote of Luke, "He is erudite, he is eloquent, his Greek approaches classical quality, he writes as an educated man, and archaeological discoveries are showing over and over again that Luke is accurate in what he has to say."

The world was at peace with *Pax Romana*. It is Roman peace, or better peace with a whip. The Roman boot was on the neck of the known world. The Roman peace brought about wide-open travel through out the empire and enabled missionary expansion. Roman roads in peacetime brought social order and protection for the apostle to the Gentiles. The decay of the great Greek philosophy and faith in the mystery religions left a spiritual vacuum and hunger that Rome could not fill. But the Greeks left a perfect language for communicating the message of God's redemption.

A sovereign God had prepared a people, a nation, and specific time in history to do the unimaginable thing.

Joseph and Mary are of the "family of David" (vv. 3-5)

And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child (vv. 3-5). Bethlehem was real city in history and still in existence to this day. Going back to the ancestral city appears to be a sensitive political decision by the Roman authorities that allowed the Jews to follow their own social customs. The city where the family registry for King David's descendents was kept was in Bethlehem.

Two humble, unknown peasants in Palestine are marching under the order of Caesar Augustus to fulfill God's will. In the greatest time in history the LORD God turned to a peasant Jewish home in Nazareth, Galilee of the Gentiles. You know what men thought of Nazareth. Thirty years later Nathanael laughed, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

Has God made a mistake? Did He choose a carpenter's family without name, rank, wealth, education, political influence, etc?

Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth, and they travel 63 miles to Bethlehem, a couple of miles outside of Jerusalem. It is 90 miles if they go round about Samaria because no pious Jew would take a short cut through Samaria in the first century Israel. The pious Zealots revolted because they viewed the census as a sign of loyalty to the emperor and a compromise of their faith in God (Acts 5:37). However, Joseph obeyed the census that God used to bring Jesus to Bethlehem.

Jesus in Bethlehem fulfilled the prophecy of Micah (5:2), and the promise to King David (2 Samuel 7:14-17). Joseph had to return to Bethlehem, his ancestral home, so Jesus could be born in Bethlehem as David had been. Remember, this was happening in fulfillment of prophecy that had been made 700 years before by Micah. The Messiah has to be born in Bethlehem of Judea. Now the events were taking place under the government of God. Remember those faithful words of Paul in Romans 8:28? "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Who is sovereign in the affairs of mankind? Caesar or God? Augustus was sovereign ruler over the entire Roman Empire, yet he unwittingly served the plans of the Sovereign of the universe to fulfill His eternal messianic purposes.

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The womb of this pregnant teen is the tabernacle of God incarnate (John 1:1-3, 14, 18). The One whom she carried was in the words of the apostle Paul, Him who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. . . For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him (Colossians 1:15, 19).

Mary made the journey along with Joseph to Bethlehem (v. 5). Luke is careful to tell us she was engaged to him, and was with child (v. 5; 1:27; Matt. 1:18). Engagement in the first century Jewish society was taken quite seriously. From the moment of engagement the woman was treated as if actually married and the relationship could only be dissolved by a writ of divorce. Unfaithfulness was considered adultery. The couple did not consummate marriage until the wedding celebration and the man took her to his home. Both Mary and Joseph make this very clear in their testimonies (cf. Matt. 1:18ff; Luke 1:27-35). Don't doubt for one moment that Dr. Luke did not ask Mary serious questions when he interviewed her forty years later for the writing of this Gospel.

Christ Himself is a miracle. He is miraculous. Therefore, any miracles He performed are minor when set before the wonder of who He is. His very incarnation is a miracle. God reigns and He is not imprisoned by His own house rules. He is not imprisoned by the normal laws of conception. All He needed was availability.

The divine messenger had said to Mary nine months earlier, Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you. . . Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus (Luke 1:28-31). Mary said wait a minute! How can this be, since I am a virgin? (v. 34). Literally, a man I know not. She was a young woman who had preserved the purity of her body. How can this be? The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God (v. 35). That is the only way you can account for Jesus Christ. The angel uses the figure of a shadow, of a cloud, the symbol of divine presence coming upon Mary. It is the cloud of glory, the *Shekinah* in the Old Testament that resided above the Ark of the Covenant. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary and overshadowed her with His power, through which she became pregnant. The overshadowing of the presence of God caused Mary to be with child. God did it.

The miraculous element was in the manner of the begetting or conception of Christ in Mary. Clearly the literal message is that Jesus was to be born of Mary without a human father (cf. Matt. 1:18-25). If Jesus were a very special person —Immanuel— He would have a very special entry into the world. A natural savior provides no supernatural help; a human savior offers no divine hope. A sinful savior is really no savior at all. However, God solved the problem of sin by providing a sinless Savior. The virgin conception as well as the virgin birth is the only answer. The virgin birth provided a sin free nature. It provides a divine and a human nature. In that body the God-man came to redeem us from sin.

CHRIST IS BORN (2:6-7)

While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn (vv. 6-7).

This "her first-born son," will not be her only son. The natural expression is that this is her first child and after Mary had given birth to Jesus she continued to bear children. The expression simply means no children preceded Jesus. The names of Jesus' half-brothers are mentioned in Matthew 13:55, and reference is made to his sisters in v. 56. It is almost like Luke underlined the word first-born son for us to give emphasis that there would be more children to follow. Jesus was her first-born, not Joseph's. Joseph was the legal Jewish father by adoption, but not by conception (cf. Matt. 1:16). Again, the emphasis is on the fact that Mary was a

father by adoption, but not by conception (cf. Matt. 1:16). Again, the emphasis is on the fact that Mary was a virgin.

After He was born she wrapped Jesus in cloths, or swaddling clothes that consisted of square piece of cloth with a long bandage-like strip coming diagonally off from one corner. The Jewish mothers of the day thought the strips of cloth would protect his fragile limbs, strengthen his back and provide proper growth for his bones. The child was first wrapped in the square of cloth and then the long strip was wound round and round about him. The wrapping of Jesus in such a manner has reminded many scholars of the preparation and wrapping of Jesus for His burial after His death on the cross.

The baby was born and placed in "manger" which was nothing more than a feeding trough or box for feeding animals. The baby is born in a stable, not in a palace; placed in a feeding trough, not a pretty bassinet in the palace of a king.

Did God get confused? No. Sometimes God's work goes on quietly in hidden places. The dignity of the event is the person who is at center stage. This is the Messiah, the Anointed of the LORD God who is being brought down to Israel to deliver His people. The apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 2:6-7, ". . . although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. On another occasion he wrote, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9).

"There was no room in the inn."

The "inn" was not a five star hotel. It was not the place you would want to take your family on vacation. Even these caravan stopovers were overcrowded that day. It was merely an enclosure, a place for the traveler to drive his cattle for the night. Some of these inns had apartments for travelers, but there was no food and no host. They were little more than brothels. There was no room even in one of the places for the poorest, the place for animals. Travelers provided their own food. The innkeeper provided was hay for the animals and a fire to prepare the food on and provide warmth. The town was crowded because of the census, and there was no room for Joseph and Mary. Mary and Joseph camped in the courtyard. The innkeeper was not cruel or inhospitable; he simply didn't have any room left. The poor couple had no relatives in the capital city. As far as we can determine, they were all alone and completely dependent upon God to provide for all their needs. At end of the day Mary and Joseph can say I saw God provide all we needed.

"No room in the inn" became prophetic words of the truth that "He came unto His own and His own received Him not" (John 1:11).

Is there room in my heart for Jesus? There are hearts that never welcome Jesus, not because of hatred toward Him, but simply because their hearts are already overcrowded with thoughts of riches, honor, prestige, pleasure, business affairs, etc. No room. No time to reflect on His will, no desire to go out of their way to do what will please Him. They want a folk religion that is convenient and full of superstition, but not too serious and please no commitment. Make it convenient and easy in my fast paced world, but please no more obligations in my hectic schedule. Maybe some other day, but not today.

What is my attitude toward Jesus? How do I crowd Jesus out of life? Do I say by my *life style* "no room?" Come back another day? I really would like to have you some other day when it is more convenient? Do I say "no room" by my *attitudes* in life? Come back another day when you do not interfere with my goals, and plans I have for my life. I'm sorry but you really don't fit into my plans for the future; when I get ready to die, maybe, but not now. I want what I know is best for me. Sorry, but "no room." Do I say "no room" by

die, maybe, but not now. I want what I know is best for me. Sorry, but "no room." Do I say "no room" by my *behaviors*? Do my actions say "no room," you would be embarrassed if you came with me today and followed me around the office, or the class room, or my business. Do I say "no room" in my *thought* life? Does my thinking reflect the mind of Christ? Sorry, but my mind is cluttered with a lot of conflicting philosophical ideas and new age concepts. There is no room for the ethical demands of clear thinking and submission to God. I have my own way of looking at life. I have my own *philosophy* of life. Sorry.

The apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 3:16-18 that Christ wants to settle down and make Himself permanently at home in our hearts. He doesn't want us to wait for some more convenient time, but right now, today right where we are.

If you need help in becoming a Christian here is [A Free Gift for You](#).

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