**WORSHIP**

**Christmas Eve – Gospel**

*The Birth of Jesus*

**In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ﻿2﻿ (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ﻿3﻿ And everyone went to his own town to register. ﻿4﻿ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ﻿5﻿ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ﻿6﻿ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ﻿7﻿ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.**

**2:1** Luke is the only Gospel writer who relates his narrative to dates of world history. (CSB)

 *Caesar Augustus.* The first and (according to many) greatest Roman emperor (31 b.c.–a.d. 14). Having replaced the republic with an imperial form of government, he expanded the empire to include the entire Mediterranean world, established the famed *Pax Romana* (“Roman Peace”) and ushered in the golden age of Roman literature and architecture. Augustus (which means “exalted”) was a title voted to him by the Roman senate in 27 b.c. (CSB)

In 27 BC, the Roman Senate conferred on Octavian, the reigning Caesar, the title “Augustus” (“the exalted one”). For all his glory, however, Caesar Augustus remained God’s instrument. His call for a worldwide census unwittingly set into motion the events of Jesus’ birth, thereby bringing to fulfillment the prophecy regarding his place of birth (Mi 5:2). (TLSB)

The association with the census of Caesar Augustus suggests that this descendent of David, with his royal bloodlines, is the Prince of all peoples, a universal King. The theme that dominates Luke-Acts is that salvation through Jesus is for everyone. (CC p. 106)

 *all the world*. Gk *oikoumene*, “the inhabited world,” here meaning the Roman Empire. Luke will use such terms later to emphasize the all-inclusive nature of the Gospel. (TLSB)

 *registered*. Necessary for taxation. (TLSB)

 *census.* Used for military service and taxation. Jews, however, were exempt from Roman military service. God used the decree of a pagan emperor to fulfill the prophecy of Mic 5:2. (CSB)

ἀπογράφεσθαι—“Register” was for tax purposes but was not itself the moment of taxation. It was equivalent to a census. The significance of the census is emphasized by its repeated use in the first five verses (ἀπογράφομαι—2:1, 3, 5; ἀπογραφή—2:2). (CC)

 *Roman world.* See map No. 13 at the end of the Study Bible. (CSB)

**2:2** *Quirinius.* This official was possibly in office for two terms, first 6–4 b.c. and then a.d. 6–9. A census is associated with each term. This is the first; Ac 5:37 refers to the second. (CSB)

May have held this office twice and conducted a census in each term. First, when Jesus was born, and then in AD 6–9 (Ac 5:37). (TLSB)

The governorship of Quirinius was an important turning point in Judean history, marking as it did the annexation of Judea, which was made profoundly visible by the census registration with which Quirinious’ governorship began. (CC p. 104)

**2:3** *own town.* Probably the town of their ancestral origin. (CSB)

**2:4** *Nazareth … Bethlehem.* Bethlehem, the town where David was born (1Sa 17:12; 20:6), was at least a three-day trip from Nazareth. (CSB)

Hometown of Joseph’s and Mary’s ancestor King David. (TLSB)

Bethlehem means “house of bread.” Luke will show throughout the narrative that Jesus comes to sit at table with his people and break bread and reveals himself for the first time as the crucified and risen Christ in the breaking of the bread (24:30-31, 35) (CC p. 104)

 *Judea.* The Greco-Roman designation for the southern part of Palestine, earlier included in the kingdom of Judah. (CSB)

**2:5** *with Mary.* Mary too was of the house of David and probably was required to enroll. In Syria, the Roman province in which Palestine was located, women 12 years of age and older were required to pay poll tax and therefore to register. (CSB)

Mary was also subject to Roman taxes and required to participate in the census. (TLSB)

 *pledged to be married.* See note on Mt 1:18. (CSB)

**2:7** *cloths.* Strips of cloth were regularly used to wrap a newborn infant. (CSB)

A sign of tender care. Babies were washed, rubbed with salt (and possibly olive oil), and then wrapped (cf Ezk 16:4). Strips of cloth were wrapped tightly around infants to warm and secure them. (TLSB)

Wrapped round with rough pieces of cloth; he is not to be found in an ornate golden bed, but in a manger. The meaning of this is that did not merely take upon himself our lowly mortality, but for our sakes took upon himself the clothing of the poor. (CC p. 108)

 *manger.* The feeding trough of the animals. This is the only indication that Christ was born in a stable. Very early tradition suggests that it was a cave, perhaps used as a stable. (CSB)

2 Corinthians 8:9 “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

 *no place for them in the inn*. Mary and Joseph were forced to bed down in a nearby cave or stable, where animals were housed. The travel caused by the census likely overwhelmed normal arrangements for hospitality. (TLSB)

**2:1–7** Joseph and Mary travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where Jesus is born in humble circumstances. The birth of a child always comes with great hardship (Gn 3:16). The birth of this Child comes with great blessings for sinners. As you reflect on the wonder of Jesus’ birth, pray also for a humble and pure heart. The mighty Lord will have mercy on you and exalt you by grace alone (Lk 1:49–52). • O Holy Child, grant me sincere humility, even as You exalt me by calling me God’s child. Amen. (TLSB)

*The Shepherds and the Angels*

**8﻿ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ﻿9﻿ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ﻿10﻿ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ﻿11﻿ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ﻿a﻿ the Lord. ﻿12﻿ This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” ﻿13﻿ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ﻿14﻿ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” ﻿15﻿ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” ﻿16﻿ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ﻿17﻿ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ﻿18﻿ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ﻿19﻿ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ﻿20﻿ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.**

**2:8** The Judean countryside has long been used for grazing sheep. David himself had been a shepherd in these fields (1Sm 16:11). (TLSB)

 *living out in the fields.* Does not necessarily mean it was summer, the dry season. The flocks reserved for temple sacrifice were kept in the fields near Bethlehem throughout the year. (CSB)

Shepherds remind the hearer that David tended flocks in these same fields and recalls that God will send his “Good Shepherd” back to Bethlehem to tend the flocks of Israel. (CC p. 104)

Shepherds had a low reputation and were looked upon with great suspicion. Strack-Billerbeck (II, 114) says that “the testimony of robbers and shepherds, violent men, and in fact all who are under suspicion when it comes to money” was considered invalid. It is comforting that the announcement of the Savior’s birth first was made to such people. We are like those shepherds. Because of our sin we are of a low and suspicious state, but God come to us anyway with Good News of great joy! (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

 *keeping watch.* Against thieves and predatory animals. (CSB)

**2:9** *An angel of the Lord.* A designation used throughout the birth narratives (see 1:11; Mt 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19). The angel in 1:11 is identified as Gabriel (1:19; see 1:26). (CSB)

 APPEARED…SHONE – These two words tie into the epiphany theme of the lessons, the manifestation of the nature and purpose of Christ. “Glory” is a key Biblical term used hundreds of times. God’s glory generally denotes God’s revelation of Himself in grace, often “incarnationally” as God took up residence in the tabernacle, temple, etc. In and through the incarnational activity of Jesus, God the Father is revealed as a loving, caring, forgiving God (John 1:14). For God’s profoundest demonstration of His being is His act of rescuing people from the predicament of sin. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

Suggests that Jesus’ birth brings the Lord’s presence near to humankind. (TLSB)

**2:10** *Do not be afraid.* Fear was the common reaction to angelic appearances (see note on 1:13), and encouragement was needed. (CSB)

The remedy for fear is faith – faith rooted in the angel’s announcement of “good news of great joy” about the birth of the Savior. People today carry around fears of all sorts. How do they get rid of them? Hear and believe the Good News! (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

 BRING YOU GOOD NEWS – εὑαγγελίζομαι—This is translated “proclaim the Good News,” to emphasize the announcement of the Gospel at the birth of Jesus. The Gospel is always something proclaimed or announced. (CC)

Gk *euangelizomai*, “I evangelize,” a favorite expression in Lk (cf 1:19; 2:10; 3:18; 4:18, 43; 7:22; 8:1; 9:6; 16:16; 20:1). Calls to mind many prophetic promises of salvation (e.g., Is 52:7; 61:1). (TLSB)

 *all the people*. Universal theme in Lk (see note, v 1). However, because Lk repeatedly follows the OT practice of calling Israel “the people,” Israel is likely meant. (TLSB)

**2:11** *town of David.* Bethlehem. (CSB)

 *Savior.* Many Jews were looking for a political leader to deliver them from Roman rule, while others were hoping for a savior to deliver them from sickness and physical hardship. But this announcement concerns the Savior who would deliver from sin and death (see Mt 1:21; Jn 4:42).

The title, as well as the related terms “save” and “salvation,” form another important Lukan theme (1:47, 69, 71, 77; 7:50; 19:9–10). (TLSB)

 *Christ.* See NIV text note. (CSB)

 *the Lord.* A designation originally reserved for God but later applied to the Messiah as well (see Ac 2:36; Php 2:11).

**2:12** *sign*. The baby serves as a sign for the shepherds that the Good News is true. More important, the prophetic sign of a son born to a virgin was fulfilled. (TLSB)

**2:14** See note on 1:46–55. This brief hymn is called the Gloria in Excelsis Deo, from the first words of the Latin Vulgate translation (meaning “Glory to God in the Highest”). The angels recognized the glory and majesty of God by giving praise to him.

 *in the highest.* A reference to heaven, where God dwells (cf. Mt 6:9). (CSB)

Refers to praise in the heavenly realms, where God and the angels live. (TLSB)

 *peace to men on whom his favor rests.* Peace is not assured to all, but only to those pleasing to God—the objects of his good pleasure (see Luke’s use of the words “pleased” and “pleasure” elsewhere: 3:22; 10:21; 12:32). The Roman world was experiencing the *Pax Romana* (“Roman Peace”), marked by external tranquillity. But the angels proclaimed a deeper, more lasting peace than that—a peace of mind and soul made possible by the Savior (v. 11). Peace with God is received by faith in Christ (Ro 5:1), and it is on believers that “his favor rests.” The Davidic Messiah was called “Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6), and Christ promised peace to his disciples (Jn 14:27). But Christ also brought conflict (the “sword”; see Mt 10:34–36; cf. Lk 12:49), for peace with God involves opposition to Satan and his work (Jas 4:4). (CSB)

Emphasizes not human goodwill but God’s grace and the peace it brings us. (TLSB)

**2:17** The Good News about Jesus is contagious. The shepherds immediately broadcast what they had seen and heard. (TLSB)

**2:19** *pondering*. Detail points to Mary as one of Luke’s sources for the Gospel. (TLSB)

**2:20** GLORIFYING – δοξάζοντες—This is the first time in Luke’s gospel that someone “glorifies” God. This will be a frequent response to the many miracles of Jesus. Besides those who respond to Jesus’ miracles, only one other person in Luke, the centurion, “was glorifying God” by saying, “In reality, this man was righteous” (23:47). (CC)

 *praising God.* A term often used by Luke (1:64; 2:13, 28; 5:25–26; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15, 18; 18:43; 19:37; 23:47; 24:53). (CSB)

AS THEY HAD BEEN TOLD – ἤκουσαν καὶ εἰ̂δον—Luke’s word order shows the faithfulness of the shepherds’ response. The word they “heard” from the angel was foremost, and they believed the word even without seeing the sign (2:15). When they “saw” the child, the sight confirmed the word, providing two witnesses, so to speak. The phrase occurs again (in the second person plural) in 7:22, but with the order reversed, referring to Jesus’ miracles that the people “saw” and then his teaching, which they “heard.” (CC)