

Christ The Savior Is Born

¹ And it came to pass in those days [*that*] a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³ So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

⁴ Joseph 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, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. ⁶ So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. ⁷ And 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.

⁸ Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. ¹⁰ Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹ "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² "And this [*will be*] the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, 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, goodwill toward men!"

¹⁵ So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us."

¹⁶ And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. ¹⁷ Now when they had seen [*Him,*] they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. ¹⁸ And all those who heard [*it*] marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹ But Mary kept all these things and pondered [*them*] in her heart. ²⁰ Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them (Luke 23:1-20 NKJV).

Context

Who, What, Where, When, and Why?

Who: Joseph, Mary, Jesus, Angels, Shepherds, "Everyone," Caesar, Quirinius – all part of the story. Really the shepherds are the most prominent characters. However, Quirinius is an important player since he would have been the one overseeing the registration/census and there is dispute about the accuracy of Luke's narrative. Quirinius was a successful general in the Roman military. Luke describes him as ἡγεμονεύω (hayg-em-on-yoo'-o), meaning someone given administrative powers, not necessarily a governor. Instead he was a procurator; they were normally dispatched to the imperial provinces. Apparently he was given the task of administering the special registration in Syria

What: A registration to record an oath of allegiance from all people under Roman rule. This took place to celebrate the silver jubilee of Caesar Augustus and to celebrate the Senate declaration that Augustus was the *Pater Patriae* – the “Father of the Country.”

Where: Luke’s account centers on Bethlehem and the surrounding countryside.

When: When all the pertinent data is considered, we conclude this took place in the fall of 2 BC.

Why: Luke’s concern is the birth of the Messiah. He wants to show the heavenly acclamation but also the lowliness of the beginnings of the Savior of the World.

The shuffling of leaders in the region took place because Palestine was a hot spot and a persistent source of trouble for the Roman empire. Quintilius Varus was governor before this (7 BC- 4BC and again 2 BC – AD 1) and then Saturninus (4 BC – 2 BC). However, Quirinius was a special delegate, a procurator with unique powers delegated by Augustus for conducting the special registration/oath concerning the *Pater Patriae*. He administered the registration for the region from Syria but was not governor. Josephus tells us that, even with the firm hand of a special procurator, there were 6000 pharisees who refused to take the oath. The descendants of David would be of special concern since his was a kingly line. Neither Caesar nor Herod wanted trouble and Herod was neck deep in trouble already with the turmoil in his own family. Thus, Quirinius.

Content

What was the original author concerned with and what did he want his original audience to understand? Furthermore, how would the original audience interpret it?

The original audience would have known exactly what Luke was talking about when he mentioned the census or registration. They would probably have understood it was to bring about a fulfillment of Micah 5:2 and it would have drawn attention to the fact Jesus was of the Davidic line. Luke doesn’t talk about it but the trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem was about 90 miles and would have been a very difficult trip for Mary.

The Greek term translated as “inn” actually meant a guestroom. Joseph and Mary would have been staying at the home of a friend or relative. The baby was born and placed in a manger not because of an insensitive innkeeper but because of the inconvenience of childbirth and caring for a baby in a crowded house.

Luke’s narrative of these events begins with the mention of men of great power and privilege but focuses on a group of people who are at the bottom of the social scale. Moreover, this account introduces a ruler with far greater power than Caesar or Quirinius.

The fact the shepherds understood the message of the appearance of the Messiah means the messianic hope ran through the entire spectrum of society. The swaddling cloths were mentioned by the angel because the shepherds should not expect to find the Messiah surrounded by the trappings of royalty. Instead, he would be found as a common peasant baby.

The shepherds immediately began to evangelize. They told everyone what the Angels had said and what they had found. Mary thought about these things and we imagine it took her some time to understand the import of all of these events.

Consideration

What are the principles found here and how do they apply to the modern Christian?

Yahweh Is the eternal Omnipotent God. Nothing that happens in history is happenstance. The placement of Caesar Augustus, the appointment of Quirinius as a special authority, the return to Bethlehem – all of this took place according to God's decree.

In the old covenant era, God spoke to his people through angels. In this new age of Jesus the Messiah God speaks to us by his Word and his Holy Spirit. It is wrong for us to want the "razzle-dazzle" of supernatural events. God's word is plain and our job is to simply understand and obey.

The Holy Spirit makes the written word alive to us. We should show our embrace of God's word in our actions. We should be excited about Christ and his kingdom and act as the shepherds did, telling everyone about salvation in Jesus the Messiah.

Moreover, we should be like Mary, pondering the truth of Scripture, meditating, renewing our mind and living a life in accordance to God's will.

Study Questions

- 1. How do we explain the description of Quirinius as "governor?"*
- 2. Why was the census/registration conducted?*
- 3. Should we expect angelic visitations in the New Covenant era? Why or why not?*

If you would like input on your answers to the study questions you may message me through myFaithBase.com or email me at mfb@davidericwilliams.com