

The Birth of Jesus Christ

Luke 2:1-7

Christmas Day December 25, 2014

Beloved of the Lord.....The *BIRTH* of Jesus Christ our Lord is a rather incredible thing. How can God be born? The prophet Micah speaks of His birth in Bethlehem this way, “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting.” Jesus Christ then the eternal *Son of God*, from everlasting to everlasting, or “from of old, from everlasting” as Micah says. Yet here on Christmas morning we can indeed speak of God being born, for Jesus is God and Man in one person, and Jesus certainly was “born of the Virgin Mary”. Thus God had a particular entrance into human history, and so the Apostle Paul writes, “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” This fullness of time was God’s window, namely that specific moment in history where He would give this fallen world, the greatest gift ever given, the gift of His only-begotten Son, who would be the sacrifice for all the world’s sins upon the cross.

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. Ceasar Augustus came after Julius Ceasar. They were both wicked men, but God had long ago ordained that the Jews would not be ruling themselves at the time Christ was born. The prophecy said, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be.” Shiloh means “tranquil”, and so Jesus would bring peace to His people, but it would be at a time where the enemies had rule over the Jews, hence the pagan Ceasar Augustus. When we have bad rulers we must still remember God has put them in power, and God will still work through them in ways higher than our own. “All things work together for good to them that love God.” When Ceasar Augustus made the decree for census and taxation, he knew nothing of Christ nor did he care, nor did he know God was using him to move Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem in order to fulfil a prophecy. But since God had decreed it long ago, so Ceasar unknowingly decreed. Proverbs 16:9 says, “A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.”

This taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. Jesus was born in the 42nd year of the reign of Ceasar August, which was also the time Cyrenius was the Roman Consul of Syria. Luke is thus very specific in recording this piece of history, the birth of Christ. It is well recorded, just as the birth of infants is recorded in hospitals today. At the time of Jesus’ birth, Joseph and Mary were registered by Rome, for **all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.** All the Jewish descendants of Jesse had to return to Bethlehem, their ancestral town, for the Jews kept good records of their ancestry, tribes, families, households etc. But this too was God’s work, so all people would know both Joseph and Mary were direct descendants of the great King David. So we call Jesus “David’s Son” but also “David’s Lord.” Likewise Jesus is the Son of Man AND the Son of God, also our Brother, even Immanuel, God with us. Isaiah writes, “unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” This Child was born to give peace to all sinners through the forgiveness of sins. Those who sorrow over their sins will always find peace in Christ. By His grace and tender mercies He also takes away all the sadness of our hearts, and fills us with heavenly peace, spiritual peace, a peace this world cannot give. All the presents that we open at Christmas time cannot be compared to this highest gift of the Son of God who came to open heaven’s doors before us.

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:) On the hills of Bethlehem is where David once tended to his sheep. On the night Jesus was born, it was also on the hills of Bethlehem **there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.** That is what a shepherd does, he watches the flock, protects them, leads and guides the sheep, making sure no harm befalls them. Jesus, the Son of God, was a shepherd too, our Good Shepherd who would give His life for the sheep. If we depart from Him, despising preaching and His Word, we become lost sheep who fall into Satan’s snare. But if we stay close to Jesus, hearing His Word, keeping His Word and commandments, trusting His love, no harm will befall us for our Good Shepherd says, “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand.”

As for that little town of Bethlehem, the place where the Son of God chose to be born, Bethlehem means “House of Bread”, and Jesus is “The Bread of Life.” So Joseph came to Bethlehem to be registered and **taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.** This was not an easy journey by any means, for Bethlehem was 60 miles from Nazareth, up and down and around the many hills of Judea. They had to walk, or ride a donkey and the journey would have taken days. Poor Mary. She was **great with child** so it was a painful journey, but this was God’s chosen path, God’s chosen will. Inwardly they probably grumbled and complained just as we do about our trials, yet they accepted God’s will in their life and they made the journey. So let us walk “by faith and not by sight” and “be ye thankful.”

We should note that even at this late date, Mary was Joseph’s **espoused wife**, for the public ceremony had not taken place yet. God had a reason for this, that we might understand Mary was yet a virgin when she gave birth. Joseph was not the father because they were only engaged. Surely there would have been relatives who gossiped about Joseph and Mary, which no doubt hurt them, but they understood the great miracle that had taken place, and they accepted the cross Christians often bear when the world talks behind our back. When we follow God and His word by faith, keeping His commandments, when we do what is pleasing in His sight, we must bear the reproach of the world, even the gossip and slander of our relatives. Jesus said “pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.” When you find yourself hurt by the words or actions of people who are mean and cruel, don’t hate them but forgive them. Take your eyes away from them and look up to heaven in prayer. Place yourself in the arms of Jesus. He still loves you and cares for you and feeds and clothes you. He is your Good Shepherd who by the cross places upon you His robe of righteousness. Be content in His love, even happy, and don’t worry about what your neighbors think. Jesus said “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.” The Apostle Paul writes, “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things....and the God of peace shall be with you.” Phil. 4

After traveling those 60 miles to Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary finally arrived in Bethlehem, yet the Bible says, **there was no room for them in the inn.** The town was packed with Jesse’s descendants, yet no one took pity on Mary’s condition. No one had compassion or mercy. But we are the people of Bethlehem who do the same to our neighbor, when we know their need but do nothing. We too have “no room for Jesus”, when we live our comfortable life at the cost of our neighbor’s needs. We’re too busy to stop everything and help poor Mary.

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son. This birth of Jesus by Mary was no different from any other birth. Mary was a sinner like all other women and men, and we cannot teach as the Catholic Church that she had no labor pangs. We don’t have the right to add to God’s Word something God doesn’t teach, nor do we have the right to take away from what God teaches. But what is far more important to understand is the poverty Jesus entered into by birth. **Mary wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.** A manger is a feeding trough for animals, hence the King of kings and Lord of lords was born in a dirty stable. Most of us are born in hospitals, or at least a house, but not Jesus. He is born in one of the lowliest places possible on a cold dark December night. This Light was born into a sin-darkened world. Nobody is there to witness this birth but Joseph and Mary, yet the angels gaze in wonder from above, and they sing **Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.**

Why was Jesus born so poor and not rich? The Bible gives the answer, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” Though this Son of God is high and lifted up, so much that the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him....for our sake Jesus now renounces His comfortable life in heaven, so He can be True Man on earth, even our Brother. As a Brother our God Jesus would suffer in our place. The Bible says, Jesus “was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” It’s because Jesus wanted to save you from your sins He chose this life of poverty and suffering, so you would not eternally suffer in hell for your sins. Jesus therefore lowered Himself from the highest heights of heaven, so He could pluck you from the devils hand and lift you out of the depths of hell. His life lived and given for you on the cross is a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God, a perfect ransom for your sins. God is not pleased with your works, for you smell to God like those dirty animals in the stable, but God is pleased with willing sacrifice of His only-begotten Son. So Jesus’ poverty makes you rich in the forgiveness of sins, grace for grace. But if if you despise Jesus and do not believe, you have no

forgiveness for your sins but you shall die in your sins. Jesus don't want that for you at all, and that is why Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life."

As for those **swaddling clothes**, swaddling clothes are nothing more than rags. When the angels appeared to the Shepherds they said, "This *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." This means "You will know the Child Jesus, because He will be clothed in rags, laying in a feeding trough." And just consider Mary and her poverty, and the poor life of suffering Jesus was entering into. Mary understood who Jesus was, and His purpose in coming, but now He has come and she has no baby clothes for Jesus. Mary meant no harm in this, but she had to clothe her firstborn son in rags, because that is all she had. She was poor....Joseph was poor....what could they do?

In like manner, these rags are a symbol of our debt to God in our sins. We cannot buy God's favor by good works as the heathen believe. Jesus therefore was clothed in rags, so He could pay our debt to God, "not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood, by His innocent suffering and death." So the Bible says "He humbled Himself." He didn't come in a grand show worthy of His name, but His first clothes were rags, scraps. Likewise at the end of His life it was no different, clothed with only a loincloth. He suffered, died, and was buried. This life which began in Bethlehem was short and brief, a mere 33 years. Yet by His fulfilling the law in our stead, and paying our penalty as a Brother, every believer is made a son or daughter of God, an adopted child, a sinner made a saint. "O come let us adore Him" for "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name." So let us believe, and so let us wait until the Lord lifts us up to heaven to be with Him. Amen.

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