

Luke 2:1-7 — What Does The Birth Of Jesus Teach Us About God's Love?

December 24, 2021

Merry Christmas! My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. I am thankful you can join us as we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Tonight, we will learn a little about what Jesus' birth teaches us about how much God loves us.

We will take a few minutes to look at what is probably one of the most familiar passages in the Bible, Luke 2:1-7. It is the story of Jesus' birth. Since this is such a familiar story, it is easy for us to read through it so quickly that we miss the significance of the story. I want us to slow down and look at it a little closer.

Let's begin with a bit of backstory. Nine months before Jesus' birth, the angel Gabriel visited the small town of Nazareth. He visited a young virgin girl named Mary. She was probably only 12-14 years of age. Gabriel told her that she would conceive through the Holy Spirit. She would have a son. That child would be the Son of God.

When Mary appeared pregnant, Joseph, her fiancé, was upset. All he could think of was infidelity. At that time, an angel spoke to him in a dream, just like an angel spoke to Mary in person. The angel told Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. He was also told two things about the child:

1. He was to name the child Jesus, which means God saves. He would save is people from their sins.
2. That the child would be Immanuel, which means God is with us. That means God in the flesh!

When we come to Luke 2, nine months have passed. Mary was full-term. She was about to give birth. In these verses, Luke tells us how the birth of Jesus

took place. These verses break into three parts. First, he told us what was happening on the world scene to bring about Jesus' birth. Second, he told us what was happening in Israel to bring about Jesus' birth. Third, he told us what was happening in the lives of Mary and Joseph. Taken together, they show us God's incredible love for us.

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What happened in the world when Jesus was born?

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. Luke 2:1–3 (ESV)

These verses show God orchestrating world events so Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. It doesn't matter how powerful people are in this world. It doesn't matter if they are willing or unwilling participants in God's plan. God is in charge. He directed the heart of a world leader to make decisions that would bring Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem for Jesus' birth.

The first man we meet in these verses is Caesar Augustus. His actual name was Gaius Octavius. He was known as Octavian. Caesar was not his name. It was his title. It. Caesar is a title similar to the title king or president. The title Caesar meant he was the ruler of Rome. Augustus was not originally part of his name. It is an adjective. It meant honored one or revered one. The title Augustus was given to Octavian in 27 B.C. by the Roman Senate as a way of honoring him. Before that time, he was known as Caesar Octavian. The senate renamed him Caesar Augustus, meaning the revered and honored Caesar.

The honorary title Caesar Augustus was appropriate. Caesar Augustus was a brilliant man. He created the Pax Romana. That means the peace of

Rome. This peace stretched over most of the world, allowing the Roman Empire and the world to flourish. He built a massive road system that enabled commerce and travel through the ancient world. His control spanned from Europe to the Middle East.

He was so revered that archaeologists have unearthed stones with the words written, "Caesar Augustus, the savior of the world." That shows us how highly revered this guy was in Rome. People considered him the savior of the world.

Caesar Augustus, who thought he was in charge of the world, had no idea that the true God who controlled the world was controlling him. The God of the universe moved Caesar Augustus' heart so he would declare a worldwide census that would move Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem so Jesus would be born in Bethlehem to fulfill prophecy.

Caesar thought he was in charge. He thought of himself as the one who was the savior of the world who brought peace. In reality, God was effortlessly controlling his heart so his will would make it possible for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem. The book of Proverbs talks about this.

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will. Proverbs 21:1 (ESV)

This is a great application for us right now. In our current political climate, isn't it comforting to know our God is in control of world history? Our God is in control of the hearts of world leaders, and he moves them in whatever way he wants them to go to accomplish his good plans and purposes.

Luke also says this was the first census while Quirinius was governor of Syria. This helps us date the census. While we don't know the dates of all Roman censuses, there was a Roman census in the year 6 A.D. We also know the Romans typically held a census every 14 years. That would mean this particular census was scheduled for around 8 B.C.

The purposes of these censuses' were for military conscription and the paying of taxes. While the Jews were exempt from serving in the Roman military, they were not exempt from Roman taxes. The Romans used these censuses to justify raising their taxes. As you would expect, the Jews were not thrilled about more taxes. History tells us the Jews were able to delay Roman censuses several times successfully. This census was held off for four or five years until non-compliance was no longer an option. At that point, Rome set a hard date for the completion of the census, similar to what April 15 would be for our taxes. This forced Mary and Joseph to travel 90 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem when Mary was nine months pregnant. The grace period for the Roman census was over. The Romans were done being nice. The census had to be completed now!

Here is what I find fascinating. From the perspective of most people, it looked like the politics between the Romans and the Jews were out of control. Nothing could have been further from the truth. God had their politics under His control. The decision in Caesar Augustus' heart to take the census was put there by God at just the right time for Jesus' birth. God also orchestrated the Jews to delay taking the census so when the deadline for the census came, Mary was forced to travel to Bethlehem when she was nine months pregnant. God worked

it all together so Mary was forced to travel to Bethlehem so Jesus would be born in Bethlehem, even though Mary and Joseph would normally have done everything they could to not travel to Bethlehem when Mary was about to give birth

I told you Jesus needed to be born in Bethlehem. Why did Jesus need to be born in Bethlehem? The reason Jesus needed to be born in that city was that God spoke by the prophet Micah hundreds of years before that Bethlehem was the city where the Son of God would be born.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Micah 5:2 (ESV)

Bethlehem was a tiny town 5 miles outside of Jerusalem. In this no-name little town would be born one who would be the ruler over God's people. Notice how this ruler would be different. First, His coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. That means his origins are from eternity past. The one who would be born in Bethlehem had always existed before space and time were created. The only one who has existed before space and time began is God. God would take on a body in space and time and be born in Bethlehem. This child would be God in the flesh!

In these verses, God controls Caesar Augustus' heart, directing him to take a census. God also moved the hearts of the Jewish leaders to delay the census until the Romans lost patience and set a hard date for the completion of the census. That forced Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem when Mary was nine months pregnant so Jesus would be born in Bethlehem and prophecy would be fulfilled.

It turned out that God directed the hearts of Caesar Augustus and the Jewish leaders to fulfill God's good plans at the perfect time.

What a great reminder for us today. While politics in our country looks out of control, we know our God is large and in charge of politics. He turns the hearts of our leaders in whatever direction he desires to carry out his good purposes in this world. If God is in charge of world history, he is also in charge of our lives. He has a good purpose he is accomplishing in our lives, perfect timing for our lives.

What was happening in Israel when Jesus was born?

And 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, his betrothed, who was with child. Luke 2:4–5 (ESV)

In these verses, we move from the world scene to the national scene in Israel. This was the travel of Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

It says Joseph "went up" from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in the land of Judea. Why does the Bible say they went up to Bethlehem?

This is talking about elevation change. Bethlehem is almost 2,564 feet higher than Nazareth. That is why it says they went up to Bethlehem. This was not just a 90-mile trip for a woman who was nine months pregnant; it was a trip that was uphill!

Let's look again at the prophecy in Micah about Jesus' birth.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Micah 5:2 (ESV)

Remember the significance of what it says. The one who always existed in eternity past, from before space and time were created, would be born in space

and time in the city of Bethlehem. That person would become the ruler of God's people.

We know what this means. Do you know when this was written?

God spoke this through the prophet Micah 700 years before Jesus' birth. That is like somebody writing a detailed description of the birth of a future president in 1324, 700 years before he was born. That is crazy! No human being can predict that kind of detail about the future. Only God knows the way history will unfold. Only God can tell us the way history will unfold.

While the world scene teaches us that God controls men's hearts, the national scene teaches us that God controls how history unfolds. God knows exactly what will happen hundreds of years before it happens!

That brings us to the final verses.

What happened in the life of Mary and Joseph when Jesus was born?

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. Luke 2:6–7 (ESV)

We know Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem when Mary gave birth, but we have no idea where Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem when she gave birth. All we know is there was no room for them in the inn. The Greek word for "inn" refers to a public shelter. These shelters were typically two stories. The dirty pack animals were kept on the bottom level. The people slept on the top level, like the loft of a barn. This says there was no room for them on the top level. Nobody made room for a nine-month-pregnant woman who was about to give birth. They had to stay on the bottom level with the animals in the manure. We

know this because after Mary gave birth, she placed baby Jesus in a manger.
The animal feeding trough was Jesus' first crib!

Think of this --- the one who existed before time began, the one who, according to Hebrews 1, created the universe --- was born that night.

...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. Hebrews 1:2 (ESV)

The one who created the universe, who controls the hearts of world leaders and the unfolding of history, was born to a homeless mother and stepfather among animals in uncomfortable, smelly, cold, and filthy conditions.

Why did God take on a body and was born in the humblest of people in the worst of conditions? He did that because he loves us, and he wanted to completely identify with us in every way so he could die to save us.

If you think the smell of manure and dirty animals at Jesus' birth is bad for the creator and sustainer of the universe, that is not nearly as repulsive as 30 years later when Jesus chose to hang on the cross and absorb into himself all the filth, stench, and vileness of our sin as he died in our places for our sin. The reason Jesus was born is so he could die for us. The Bible says that on the cross, Jesus became sin for us. Jesus absorbed all of the shame, regret, all of misery, ugliness, and pain of our sins. Like a sponge, he absorbed all of the ugliness and filth of our sin into himself as Jesus, the one who had never sinned, became the most hideous, wicked, vile thing in the universe as he took all of our sin into himself. Then, on the cross, he experience an eternity of God's wrath against our sin, in space and time as he hung on the cross dying for our sin.

Why did Jesus leave the glories of heaven to be born in a cold stable?
Why did Jesus, 30 years later, absorb all of the darkness and vileness of our sin into himself and suffer in our place on the cross? I will tell you why. Jesus loves you! He humbled himself to come and die to save you!

The Contrast

There are a lot of people here tonight. Imagine if a famous football player like Brett Favre showed up. I know what would happen after church. Everyone would want his autograph. People would want pictures with him to post on their social media. You would tell your friends about what happened, and you would be filled with excitement.

Here is what we must realize. What Brett Favre did in the game of football is nothing compared to what Jesus has done for you and me. If we would be thrilled about the presence of a celebrity tonight, we should be even more thrilled about Jesus tonight. Tomorrow, as we open presents under the tree. Be excited about the presents, but be even more excited about Jesus.

Tonight, there are two groups of people in this room. Some of you don't know Jesus. If that is you, now that you know why Jesus came, and what Jesus did, and how much he loves you, I ask you to open your heart to Jesus. Before you leave, in your heart, ask Jesus to forgive your sin and to be in charge of your life. He will. That is a gift far better than any gift you will have under the tree.

Others of us know Jesus, but you may have lost excitement for Jesus. If that is you, I pray that you go away tonight excited for Jesus because of who he is, what he has done for you, and how much he loves you.



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