

The unfolding of your words gives light.

To Seek and to Save

An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke

^{2:1} Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth^a. ²This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria^b. ³And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city^c. ⁴Joseph 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^d, ⁵in order to register along with Mary, who was

^a **2:1 a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.** This good news was set against a backdrop that made it good news. Consider the ironies: earthly rulers were making power plays and the Sovereign of the universe was born to a poor woman in a cave and placed in a feed box. The urgent time crunch for Mary and Joseph and the limited space in Bethlehem should be set next to the Creator of time and space born there. The transition from the worship of angels to a feedbox and strips of cloth.

Caesar Augustus was the powerful Roman emperor who succeeded his adopted father Julius Caesar after Caesar's infamous assassination. He was so revered after his death that the Roman senate ordered that he be worshipped. We still have a month named after him.

Have you ever heard a preacher say, "All means all and that's all all means"? Luke 2:1 (and other texts) demonstrate that word meanings hinge on context. Did Caesar Augustus tax China and the Americas? Why force meaning on a word that does not fit the context? We make the same mistake all the time.

The word translated "inhabited earth" is another illustration of how important context is to word meaning. Even more than the word *kosmos*, this word speaks of the inhabited earth. But, as powerful as Rome was, it did not have taxing authority for the planet. Of course Luke is speaking of the Roman world.

^b **2:2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.** Critics say that Luke is mistaken about Quirinius since many historians place his rise to the office of governor in Syria several years after the birth of Christ. Records indicate that a large tax levy was placed on that region in A.D. 6. During the events recorded here a man named Saturninus was governor of Syria. Lest you become troubled by this news, you should note these things:

- Difficulties in understanding an apparent inaccuracy in the Bible do not mean there is an inaccuracy in the Bible.
- Luke uses a participle that says Quirinius "was governing" in Syria, not necessarily holding the title yet.
- There are large gaps in the historical records of the timeline of the extensive political career of Quirinius.
- The early church fathers (such as Tertullian) accepted the historicity of Luke's account.
- Early skeptics (such as Julian the Heretic) did not argue against the historicity of Luke's account.
- A census is not the same thing as a tax levy, although the census was usually associated with taxation.
- Quirinius may have been a co-ruler during the time Joseph and Mary went to register.

^c **2:3 And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city.** The tribes of Israel were still assigned to specific geographic locations as laid out in the law of Moses (Joshua 13-19).

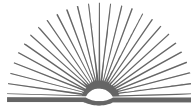
^d **2:4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David.** "Up" was a description of elevation. Joseph and Mary went into the hill country of Judea. This is a

The Gospel of Luke
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engaged to him, and was with child^a. ⁶While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth^b. ⁷And 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^{c, d}.

pertinent detail that Luke emphasizes. Nazareth did not connect Joseph and Mary to the family of David, but the family records at Bethlehem did.

^a 2:5 **in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.**

Luke emphasizes the pregnancy. This would have been a more difficult trip than the similar one Mary took during the first trimester of the pregnancy.

^b 2:6 **While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth.** This was certainly God's right time to send the Deliverer. Paul wrote:

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, Galatians 4:4

Luke was a doctor. He was pointing out that God's timing coincided with the natural physical process of gestation.

^c 2:7 **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.** It was likely a cave where the birth took place. Don't be too hard on the innkeeper. The town was crowded with others obeying the decree of Caesar. The cloths may be an indication that Joseph and Mary were poor.

^d 2:1-7 Immediately after Adam and Eve fell into sin the Scripture records the first gospel promise of the Scriptures. God addressed the serpent:

And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel. Genesis 3:15

This record of Luke is the unveiling of the One who would crush the serpent's head. It was not to happen in a way any of us would have chosen. My script would have included a globally televised stadium event featuring a giant other-worldly foot descending from heaven to squash the serpent.

But in the the wisdom of God He chose instead to use earthly events and natural circumstances to bring the Deliverer to the place that would fulfill many prophecies. He does things like that.

- He used a crop tax in Egypt to deliver the house of Jacob from starvation.
- He used a mandate for infanticide to preserve Moses the deliverer in the weeds by the Nile.
- He used a decree from a pagan government to get Messiah to the town of David to be born.
- He used the betrayal of a friend, a corrupt group of religious leaders and a brutal penal system to atone for sin of the world.

The big application in all this is that God brings about His unseen eternal plan through ordinary means and ordinary people. Here is how you live inside that framework:

1. You live obediently with what you can see. You can see the commands and promises of God. You can see His moral will. Do it.
2. You stay alert to what you cannot see. You cannot see how He is going to enforce His commands and keep his promises. He turns turbulence and tragedies into triumphs.

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