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The Birth of Jesus
Luke 2: 1-7

The birth of Jesus DIG: In light of the promises of Luke 1:30-35, how might Mary feel as she awaits delivery of her baby in a stable? How does this tie in with God's plan (Micah 5:2)? What does this story say about the LORD's control over political affairs?

REFLECT: When did ADONAI last take a situation that appeared hopeless to you and use it for His purposes? What aspect of Messiah's birth is most amazing to you? Why?

It was not man who became God, but God who became man.

In Rome, **Caesar Augustus** learned that many of **his** subjects were dishonest. **He** ruled the known world, but, the amount of taxes was not commensurate with the number of subjects. **He** held a council and **his** advisers told **him** that **he** could not levy an equitable tax until **he** had an accurate count of the populations of all **his** provinces. Therefore, **in those days** of economic oppression by a corrupt empire, political tyranny under a man who thought **he** was god, and increasing terrorism by hotheaded zealots, families had to report to their ancestral towns to register for the **census**.[106]

Caesar Augustus was born Gaius Octavius. The Roman senate bestowed on **him** the title **Augustus** in 27 BC. This title had a religious significance. It was an attempt to deify **himself**. **He** ruled until AD 14 and was succeeded by Tiberius **(Luke 3:1)**. Like Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus, **God** used **Caesar Augustus** to help in the fulfillment of Scripture so that **the Messiah**, **the Son** (*descendent*) **of David**, would be born in **Bethlehem**, even though **His** mother was living in **Nazareth**.[107]

Caesar Augustus issued an imperial **decree that a census should be taken of the entire** inhabited earth **(Luke 2:1).** In the provinces people had to report to a censor, who evaluated the character and conduct of others as a part of his tax-gathering duties. This gave him ample opportunities for corruption. So, for righteous

Jews it is hard to imagine just how offensive this was to them. **Caesar's decree** required Jews, whose only **King** was **ADONAI**, to stand in front of a Roman official to give an accounting.

It is the irony or ironies that **Caesar** wanted to make **himself** a god known throughout the world. **He** wanted to be worshiped. So, **he** signed a decree that caused people in **Nazareth** to travel to **Bethlehem** to enroll. One of **the women** who came **in those days** was carrying **the Son of God** in **her** womb. The irony is that today no one worships **Caesar Augustus**, but, the **child** in **Mary's** womb is worshiped around the world. **Augustus** thought the **census** would give **him** greater control over the world, but, in the end, all **he** did was run an errand for **God** and fulfill this prophecy: **But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me, One who will be ruler over Isra'el, whose origins are from old, from ancient times (Micah 5:2).**

In another vital proof of **Yeshua's** messianic qualifications, **Matthew** tells **his** readers that this **son of David** was also to be born in the city of **David**. **Bethlehem** was chosen as the city of this beloved **ruler** of **Isra'el**. Although not much more than a village just five miles outside of Jerusalem, the town took on even greater importance as the revelation came through **Micah** that it would be at **Beit-Lechem** that **Christ**, **David's** greater **Son**, would be born. **This was later affirmed through rabbinic tradition, as one translation of this verse actually uses the Aramaic word for Messiah in Micah's prophecy (cf. Tractate Berakhot II.4; Targum Jonathan on Micah 5:2).**[108]

This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria (Luke 2:2). Some scholars have debated **Luke's** facts, pointing out that **Quirinius** didn't become **the governor of Syria** until AD 6 and that Herod the Great died in 4 BC. But, archaeological evidence strongly suggests that **Quirinius** had been in **Syria** on a military mission for **Augustus** from 10 to 7 BC and that, with Herod's increasing mental illness, the emperor was preparing the region for direct Roman control. Therefore, the Scripture is correct, and this would have been **the first census** taken while **Quirinius was governor.**[109]

And everyone went to the town of **their** ancestors **to register (Luke 2:3).** There was no evidence that the Romans required a return to ancestral homes for tax purposes, but, while that was generally true, **Judea** was a client kingdom of Herod the Great, and so a census may have been conducted in a Jewish, rather than

in a Roman manner.[110] This, of course, would put a hardship on millions of people. It would make life more difficult to travel to distant cities, but, it had to be done. **The census** would be taken in many languages, and in places along the Rhine River, the Danube, in North Africa, Portugal, Syria, Belgium, Egypt, Palestine and all along the north Mediterranean shore.



Many were angry when **the decree** was proclaimed, claiming **Caesar** to be a tyrant. This was especially true in **Nazareth**. **Joseph** probably sought out the local tax collector and asked if women in the latter stages of pregnancy would be exempt, but, he was told no one would be excused. Even the lame and the blind had to report to the cities of their fathers, and many would have to be carried on pallets. This decree forced **Yosef** to leave **Natzeret** while **Miryam** was still pregnant and take **her** with **him to Bethlehem** for **the census**. It would be a seven-day journey if they went directly through Samaria. But there was nothing to fear, as it turned out, for **God** arranged everything ahead of time.

So Yosef, who appears without introduction, **also went up to the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Beit-Lechem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David (Luke 2:4). Bethlehem** was south of **Galilee**. Due to the height of **Bethlehem** (2,654 feet above sea level), travelers would go up from **Nazareth** (1,830 feet above sea level) on the journey to **Bethlehem**.[111]

Mary was also from **the line of David**, although apart from **Jeconiah** (**to see link click Ai – The Genealogies of Joseph and Mary**), so **she** also needed to be there for **the census**. **He went there to register with Miryam, who was pledged to**

be married to him and was expecting a child (Lk 2:5). A considerate **husband** and a wise **wife** would start the 4 to 5 day journey from **Nazareth** to **Beit-Lechem** several weeks before **her** due date.

Joseph was returning to the village from which **his** family originated. The Middle Easterner is profoundly attached to his village of family origin. Even if he had never been there before **he** could suddenly appear at the home of a distant relative, recite his genealogy, and be among friends. Since **Joseph** did have some of **his** extended family in the village, **he** was honor bound to seek them out. What's more, even if **he** didn't have family or friends in the village, as a member of the famous house of **David**, **Joseph** would still be welcomed into almost any village home. Even in the most extreme example, if **he** was a total stranger appearing in a strange village, **he** would still have been able to find shelter for the **birth** of a **child**.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, there was no room in the guest room (Luke 2:6 and **7d).** This was not a public inn with an inn keeper (see **Gw – The Parable of the Good Samaritan**, where the Greek word *pandocheion* is used to refer to a public inn), but a guest room (Greek: *katalumati*) in a private house. In the Middle East where hospitality is a sacred duty, even simple village homes had only two rooms. The main room was for the family where the entire family cooked, ate, slept and lived. They slept on mats that were taken up every morning. The other room was used exclusively by **guests**, and was attached to the end of the house or on the roof **(First Kings 17:19)**. So, it seems that other **guests** already occupied **the guest room** and the host family graciously accepted **Mary** and **Joseph** into the family room of their house.

The family room was different than in western culture. At one end of the family room there was a blocked off area for their animals. In the western culture, animals are kept away from the house in a stable or barn. But, in the Middle East, each night the family would bring their cow, donkey and a few sheep into this blocked off area at the end of their large family room. The animals would provide heat in the winter and would be kept safe from theft. **Mangers** were kept next to the animals so they could eat during the night. And every morning those same animals would be taken out and tied up in the courtyard of the house **(Luke 13:15; First Samuel 28:24; Judges 11:31)**. Such homes can be traced from 1000 BC up to 1950. A private home would have bedding, facilities for heating water and all that would be required for any peasant **birth**.[112] **Mother** and baby **Jesus** were found in stable condition!



And there **she gave birth to her firstborn, a Son**. The village midwife and other women would have assisted at the birth. After **the child** was **born Miryam wrapped Him in strips of cloth**, and, picturing **His** humble beginnings, **she placed Him in a manger (Luke 2:7 b-c).** Therefore, the **bread of life (John 6:35)** was born in **Beit-Lechem (Luke 2:7a),** which means *the house of bread.* There were no trappings of royalty, no purple robes, and no signs of wealth or position, although **Jesus** was born to be **King of kings and Lord of lords**.[113]

But, make no mistake . . . **He** was no ordinary **baby**. **Yeshua's** closest friend in this world, **John,** described **His** birth this way: **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. And the Word was with God, and we have seen His glory, the glory of the One and only Son, who came from the Father. And the Word was God, full of grace and truth (John 1:1** and **14).** In the weakness of human flesh, **He** came to earth. However, when **He** became a man in the person of **Yeshua Messiah**, **He** did not cease to be **God**, nor did **He** lose **His** divine attributes, such as being ever-present and all-powerful. **He** merely laid them aside for a time. This choice is called *kenosis,* which comes from a Greek word meaning *to empty.*[114] Rabbi Sha'ul put it this way. **Jesus Christ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:7-8 NASB).**

Because of what **Luke** says, it is possible to determine generally when **Jesus** was **born**. We know **He** had to be **born** before the year 4 BC for the simple reason that in 4 BC Herod the Great died and **Christ** was born when Herod was still living. Next,

the decree of Quirinius came in 8 BC, so we can conclude the **Yeshua** was born some time between 4 BC and 8 BC. Josephus, the Jew who became a Roman historian between 80 to 90 AD, wrote that Herod the Great left Jerusalem in 5 BC and went to Jericho and remained there until his death. Since the Magi saw Herod the Great while he was still living in Jerusalem, we can deduce the **Messiah's** birth had to be 6 BCE or earlier.[115]

In the final analysis, we just don't know exactly when **Jesus** was born. I do not think **He** was born on a Jewish holiday like the Feast of Booths or during Passover. If you notice, if **Yeshua** did or said anything on a specific Jewish holy day, the writer always mentions it. It would seem, then, that if **He** had been **born** on any Jewish holiday, **Matthew** and **Luke** would have mentioned it, as both of them deal with the birth of **the Messiah**. This would especially be true of **Mattityahu**, who was writing to a Jewish audience. The total silence of both **Matthew** and **Luke** in connecting **Christ's** birth with any Jewish holy day suggests to me that **the Savior** was **born** on a normal day. For this reason, the gospel writers do not make mention of the date.

It is important to remember the reason for **Yeshua's** birth. **ADONAI** chose to send **His Son** to take our place as **the sacrificial lamb (Leviticus 1:4; John 1:29; First Corinthians 5:7)**, so those who love and follow **Christ** as their **Lord** and **Savior**, will spend eternity in everlasting joy in heaven with **God**.