

# Christmas Message

## Title: “The Divine Birth”

Luke 2:1-7 ~ December 12, 2010

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**OBJECTIVE:** *To teach that God is sovereign in the midst of chaos and difficulty.*

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### Announcements

- Welcome / guests
- Christmas services at cdobc
- AWANA Grand Prix – purchase cars (\$5.00) in courtyard – date: Feb. 12<sup>th</sup> - great outreach – helpers with workshop on Feb. 5<sup>th</sup>.
- 2010 Budget...The Home Stretch!
- Check bulletin for ministry details

### Opening Prayer

Over the past several years, during the Christmas Season, I have been working my way through the first chapter of Luke.

2006:

**“A Divine Mess”** Matt. 1:18-2:23; Luke 1:26-38 ~ December 24, 2006

**“A Divine Mission”** Luke 1:26-28 ~ December 24, 2006

**“Fear of the Divine”** Luke 1:28-30 ~ December 31, 2006

2007:

**“A Divine Baby”** Isaiah 7:13-16; Matt. 1:18-23; Luke 1:29-33 ~ December 16, 2007

**“A Divine Life”** Luke 1:26-38 ~ December 23, 2007

2008:

**“Trusting the Divine Plan”** Luke 1:26-38 ~ December 21, 2008

2009:

**“The Divine Plan Confirmed”** Luke 1:39-45 ~ December 20, 2009

**“Praising the Divine for Christmas”** Luke 1:46-55 ~ December 27, 2009

The last section of Luke 1 is the account of John the Baptizer’s birth. I’ll be moving past that, and into chapter 2 as the account of Jesus’ birth continues.

2010:

**“The Divine Birth”** Luke 2:1-7 ~ December 12, 2010

**“The Divine Announcement”** Luke 2:8-14 ~ December 26, 2010

2011:

**“Visiting a Divine Baby”** Luke 2:15-20 ~ December 11, 2011

**“The Sign of Divine Blessing”** Luke 2:21-40 ~ December 25, 2011

**Read 2:1-3**

**God is sovereign in human history.** vs. 1-3

The decree in vs. 1 was a simple thing really, a census of the entire known world. A census was simply a registration – *apographō* - “to write something”. A census would be taken for two reasons. First, it was to register people for military service (Jews were exempt from this part), and second, for taxation. Vs. 1 – “decree” – a royal order / edict (“Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census...”)

Caesar is a title – not a name

Augustus is not a name – it’s an adjective – meaning *august, highly revered, honored*

This decree then comes from one of the Caesar’s – a Caesar who was highly honored.

Caesar Augustus’ real name was Gaius Octavius – born in 9/23/63 B.C. – later known as Octavian. He was the grand-nephew of Julius Caesar – in other words, he was born into great wealth and power – a silver spoon (or two!) in his mouth. Julius Caesar took great interest in this young boy, and when Gaius Octavius was twenty years old, Julius Caesar was assassinated by Brutus and friends, and Gaius Octavius found out that Julius Caesar had adopted him as his own son, thereby, setting him up to be the heir to the throne of the Roman Empire.

It is interesting that after he was assassinated, Julius Caesar was deified...made into a God. This was a great encouragement to Gaius Octavius, since he was so closely associated with Julius Caesar, and one historian tells us: “Meanwhile Octavian's own standing had been heightened by the deification of Julius Caesar in early 42 BC. He was no longer to be addressed as 'Octavian' but insisted on being called 'Caesar' and he now styled himself as '*divi filius*' - 'son of the divine'.” (Source: <http://www.roman-empire.net/emperors/augustus.html>)

During the following years, Gaius Octavius rose to become the most powerful and most loved ruler of the Roman Empire. Under his reign, Rome enjoyed an unparalleled time of peace – the *Pax Romana*. It was during this time that vast construction projects were undertaken throughout the Roman Empire...specifically, roads were built that greatly improved travel for commerce and Rome enjoyed a great time of prosperity. However, in the larger plan of God, hindsight allows us to see that God used the *Pax Romana* as the perfect soil for the spread of the Gospel. This time of peace allowed the early church to take the Gospel throughout the known world. Gal. 4:4 says “But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under Law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”

In 27 B.C., the Roman Senate gave Gaius Octavius the title ‘Augustus’ – which means honored one, majestic one.

There is an inscription at Halicarnassus (hometown of the famous Greek writer Herodotus, modern day Turkey) that honors Caesar Augustus as “The Savior of the World”.

He was called the ‘*son of a god*’, was referred to as ‘*the savior of the world*’, but in reality, it was Caesar Augustus who issued the royal decree of the nationwide census, that

made it possible for Jesus, the true Son of God, the only Savior of the world, to be born in Bethlehem.

This is a really important point for you to grasp this morning: God sovereignly uses nations and rulers to accomplish His decree.

Even evil acts, good acts, and normal citizens – all of these things He uses to accomplish His own decree.

Caesar Augustus' rise to power was no threat to God or His plan. In fact, you could make the case that God blessed him to the position of Caesar so that the *pax Romana* could become a reality. The census has the fingerprints of God all over it! It was the census that brought Joseph and Mary from their home town of Nazareth about 80+ miles to Bethlehem in fulfillment of Micah 5:2.

Everything was in perfect harmony for the plan of God. The entire movement of history was in perfect tune and synchronized to the day. The wars and political landscape of the world, the life of Joseph and Mary, and the decree for the census at the exact time when Joseph and Mary would have to travel to Bethlehem, late in her pregnancy point to the hand of God in history. All these things were orchestrated by God to fulfill His Word about the birth of the Messiah.

Here's where this point connects with our everyday life.

Do you ever watch the news and wonder what in the world is going on? Do you ever wonder why God doesn't just step-in and take over? Does it seem like things are going downhill so fast that disaster must be around the corner?

Be assured...God has never lost control.

Be comforted and encouraged that God is fully aware of what is going on...and He is using all things for His decree...His plan...His glory.

His ways are different from our ways, but we can trust His ways. This is where our theology connects with our daily life. When we know the person of God – that He is all-knowing (omniscient), all-powerful (omnipotent), all-wise (Omni sapient). The Bible tells us that these things are true of God – but they are more than mere head-knowledge for us. They help assure us and comfort us that in the midst of a world that is in chaos, we know that God is in control – and that since He is all these things, the confusion and chaos we see is actually a sophisticated, detailed plan where God is at work.

Just like God was directing history during the reign of Caesar Augustus, we also know that He is still directing history in the world we live in. So take comfort and be joyful...God is sovereign in human history.

### **God is sovereign in your life.** vs. 4-7

#### **Read vs. 4-7**

History tells us that a Roman census would not have required a person or family to travel to their ancestral hometown to register. However, it seems that the Jews did do this, probably due to the Jewish interest and passion for the tribes and the families of origin.

So, we see Joseph and Mary, registering in this census not in their hometown of Nazareth, in Galilee, but in Bethlehem of Judea. This would have been an extremely difficult journey for Mary, in her ninth month of pregnancy!

*Sanctified Speculation/ Inspired Imagination:* Seems to have been some sort of deadline imposed on Israel that forced Joseph and Mary to make the trip to Bethlehem in the 9<sup>th</sup> month of her pregnancy (You wouldn't think they would have planned to

make the trip at this time!). Imagine what they thought about this trip...if you were bearing the Messiah – the Son of God – wouldn't you expect that God would make things easier for this baby? Wouldn't you expect that God would take every precaution to make sure mom and baby were cared for and protected in the most advantageous way?

**Micah 5:2** – (written 300 yrs. after David's birth, 700 yrs. before Jesus' birth) “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 Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient time.”

Once again, we see God using the small and insignificant things of the world to be elevated to the highest honor. Not only did God choose (from a human perspective) two insignificant people in Joseph and Mary, but when Micah, through the Holy Spirit says that Bethlehem “...though you are small among the clans of Judah”, he's saying that Bethlehem is not an important or influential city. However, a ruler – the Messiah will come from you!

Back to vs. 4 of Luke 2...Joseph went “...to Bethlehem, the town of David”.

In the Old Testament, when you read of the “City of David”, it's referring to Jerusalem, or more precisely, a small section within Jerusalem where David reigned and ruled on Mt. Zion. Now Bethlehem is about six miles from Jerusalem. It's also called the city of David because that is where David was born.

**1 Samuel 16:1b**

“Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.”

Now in vs. 5, we have an apparent discrepancy with what Matthew tells us about this whole situation. Chronologically, I believe Matthew 1:18-25 fits into Luke's account after Luke 1:56. I believe that Mary goes home from Elizabeth's house, and then tells Joseph the news about her pregnancy. She might have been showing by that time so it was no longer possible to keep her pregnancy a secret.

Now, the apparent discrepancy is in their marital status. Matthew tells us in 1:24 that "When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife."

So, according to Matthew, it seems pretty clear that a marriage ceremony took place at that time.

But Luke tells us in 2:5 that "...Mary, who was pledged to be married to him..." They were engaged, according to Luke.

Why the apparent discrepancy?

Well, the marriage had not been consummated yet...both Matthew and Luke are correct.

Notice Matthew 1:25 "But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus."

Even though they were married, since the marriage had not been consummated yet, technically, the marriage was not official. Since they were not intimate yet, even though they were married, their relationship had remained at the 'betrothal' or 'engaged' level.

Vs. 6-7 – the greatest understatement in world history. Luke uses a single sentence to document that God had become flesh. The second member of the Trinity became clothed in humanity, and took the name, Jesus.

So we see God not only directing Caesar Augustus to issue the census decree, but we also see God working and leading

in the lives of Joseph and Mary – leading them to the place of Jesus’ prophesied birth.

**God changes the world with normal people.** vs. 6-7

Joseph and Mary were 80+ miles from home. They were alone. There was nobody there for this couple. Mary was probably a young teenage girl (13-15 yrs. old), and would certainly want her mother at her side as her first child is born. But they have nobody there with them...except God. They probably drew a great deal of strength and courage from knowing the true identity of this baby...the Messiah...the Son of God! Their loneliness was real, but not overwhelming because they understood the divine call God had brought into their life. They heard the words of the angel, Gabriel, say that this baby boy, Jesus, would “...save his people from their sins.” (Matt. 1:21).

Luke tells us that she has her “firstborn, a son” - *prōtotokos*  
If this was Mary’s only child – only son, then the Greek word would be different – *monogenes* – only son.

Jesus was Mary’s *firstborn* son, not her *only* son.

Matthew 12:46 “While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him.”

Matthew 13:55-56 “Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us?”

See also Luke 8:19; John 2:12; John 7:3; Acts 1:14

That Jesus was the firstborn was important. First, it speaks indirectly to Mary’s virginity, and second, it means He has the right to the inheritance. Since they were of the line of David, this made Jesus eligible for the throne of David!

Vs. 7 - Wrapping a baby in strips of cloth was normal. Mary had no special fabric...no royal robe to place around Jesus. He was a normal baby, who was cared for like any other baby.

**Illus.** – wrapping up my kids...baby burritos!

Obviously, Jesus wasn't a normal baby in a spiritual sense, but in a physical sense, He was normal, and Mary cared for Him like any other baby would have been cared for.

## **Application**

Take comfort in God's sovereign work in history.

Since He is sovereign, we know that He is not surprised by any turn history takes. When we understand the perfections of His character, we can trust what He sovereignly does...and what He sovereignly allows in history. This does not eliminate our concern regarding the state of our world, for our faith compels us to care for and be concerned for the hurting. But, this prevents us from a fatalistic attitude of where our world is leading.

Are you a 'world changer'?

Most of us in this room are normal people. We aren't famous; we don't have celebrity status (thank goodness!). This means that you are exactly the type of person that God loves to use to affect history. All throughout Scripture, we see God using normal, everyday, salt-of-the-earth people to do amazing things. Typically, God changes the world through you – by changing one person at a time.

*Door hangers*

**A**dmit your sins to God / Admit you are a sinner  
**B**elieve that Jesus was born...and died for your sins.  
**C**hoose to follow Christ each day.

Give yourself to God...give you life to Him...give  
yourself fully to His call – His decree, and allow Him to  
change the world through you!

Close in prayer