

December 28, 2025 – First Sunday after Christmas

The Birth of Jesus - Luke 2:1-20

In my interpretation Joseph had been living in Bethlehem, went to nearby Ein Karem to see Mary when she was staying with her relative Elizabeth for three months, and then returned with Mary to Nazareth. But the prophet Micah (5: 2) had said that the one who would rule Israel would be born in Bethlehem not in Nazareth. How did that come about?

1 - In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered.

God used even a pagan emperor who wanted to raise taxes to fulfill His promises.

2 Chronicles 36: 22-23 (cf. Ezra 1: 1-4) – In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent out a herald throughout all his kingdom and also declared in a written edict. Isaiah 45: 1, 4 – Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him: I call you by your name, though you do not know me.

2 - This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

Luke was an evangelist and a theologian, but he was also a historian.

Luke 1: 3 – I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus.

Luke 3: 1-2 – In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberias.

Distinguishing between the "we" sections and the "they" sections in the book of Acts.

Acts 18: 12 – When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul.

3-5 - All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

Joseph had to return to Bethlehem because that was his hometown.

Paying taxes is bad enough. What if you had to return to your hometown to pay them?

A difficult journey at a terrible time – film "The Nativity Story"

The artists give Mary a donkey to ride on; the Gospel writer Luke does not.

Christmas devotional during 2020 – "Unwanted Journeys"

6-7 - While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The word that is translated "inn" can also be translated "guestroom."

So it is not that Joseph forgot to make reservations in Bethlehem, leading to his and Mary's first argument. Cf. landing on Santorini at 4 AM from the ship Nirefs.

Instead it was that Joseph's family home was full because of all the relatives in town for the census.

The guestroom was full, so Joseph and Mary went into the cave behind the home where the animals stayed, and there Jesus was born.

Traditional site of the burial place of Jesus.

The artists include various kinds of animals being in awe over the birth of Jesus, but Luke does not mention any animals. But he does mention a manger.

This also explains why in Matthew 2: 11, after all the relatives had gone home and when the wise men arrived, Joseph and Mary and baby Jesus were in a house.

8-10 - In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people."

Angel Gabriel to Zechariah in Luke 1: 13 – "Do not be afraid, for your prayer has been heard."

Angel Gabriel to Mary in Luke 1: 30 – "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

Angel to Joseph in Mathew 1: 20 – "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife."

I believe angels are not beautiful women but soldiers/warriors.

I would not see a beautiful woman rolling away the stone from in front of Jesus' tomb and causing sixteen Roman soldiers to shake from fear and be like dead men. (Matthew 28: 1-4)

11-14 – "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

15-16 - When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

17-18 - When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

They were amazed, but did anyone go to Bethlehem to check it out?

Cf. Matthew 2: 4-6 – There is no indication that even the chief priests and scribes, who knew where the Messiah was to be born, went to check it out.

19 - But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

What were the things that Mary treasured and pondered in her heart?

Christmas Eve sermon and later Christmas devotional – "The Things in Mary's Heart"

How much she loved and appreciated Joseph

The strangeness and unexpectedness of the whole situation

How close she felt to God

What times in your life do you most treasure and ponder in your heart?

What experiences from this Christmas season will you treasure and ponder in your heart?

20 - The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

The shepherds returned to the same sheep in the same fields, but they returned glorifying and praising God because they had seen the Savior.

Cf. Matthew 2: 12 – And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, (the wise men) left for their own country by another road.