

Luke 2:1-14
Christmas 2022
The Historical Setting of the Birth of Christ

Today we are in a special section. We are in Luke chapter 2 verses 1 through 14 dealing with the introduction to the birth of Christ. And this section is going to emphasize the historical settings that surrounded the birth of Christ.

Beginning at verse 1, **Now it happened in those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that all the habitable world should be registered.** So if you are following along with a different translation, you will notice that the last word I read as *registered*, most English translations have the word *taxed*. It is literally the word *registered*. It was brought about by Caesar Augustus, the emperor of Rome. Caesar Augustus - those are two titles. His real name is Gaius Octavius. The word *Caesar* comes from the first Emperor of Rome, Julius Caesar. And *Augustus*, the second title, means *one who is exalted*. So not only was he Roman Emperor but he let everybody know that he was the exalted one, Caesar Augustus. And he made a decree that the whole habitable world should go and be registered.

This first registration, verse 2, happened while Cyranus was governing Syria. Some English texts have it that Cyranus, or Quirinius some English text have, was governor of Syria. He was not governor, he was *governing* Syria. Some people use this as a proof text that Christ was not born when they said He was born because he was not governor of Syria. And it is true he was not, he was governing. That is he was a substitute governor at this time. It is a participle, says he was governing.

Verses 3 and 4, **And all were going to be registered, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, into the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, on account of he was from out of the house and the lineage of David.** So this registration took place every fourteen years. And it took two to three years to complete. The decree said to go to register where your family members are from. So they had to go to Bethlehem, the city of David, because he is from the lineage of David. So they had to go to Bethlehem in order to register for the census. It is approximately seventy to eight miles one trip. They went by donkey. She is eight months pregnant, over eighty miles. So she has got some difficulties to deal with surrounding the birth of the Christ.

Verse 5, **To be registered with Mary who had been engaged to him as wife, she being pregnant.** The little phrase *engaged to him as wife* is an interesting phrase. Remember that she was found pregnant by the Holy Spirit during their one-year engagement period. The engagement period started at the ceremony for the pledge of purity for one year wait before the wedding actually takes place. But it is part of the wedding or marriage itself, which means in order to break the engagement you have to file a divorce. So that is why it says, that is why the text says when she was **engaged to him as his wife**. How can he be engaged if she is his wife? It is because engagement was part of the marriage relationship.

Verse 6, **And it happened while they were there the days were fulfilled, that she should give birth. And she gave birth to her son, the firstborn.** Notice how I am reading

this. **She gave birth to her son, the firstborn and she wrapped Him in linen cloth, and laid Him in a feeding trough, because there was no place for them in the inn.** So I left the translation in its literal poetical form, that she wrapped Him in linen cloth and laid Him in a feeding trough. It has a nice poetical sound to it, it is the literal translation. Notice the literal translation again in the text. Most English Bibles say, *and she gave birth to her firstborn son.* But it is literally, **she gave birth to her son, the firstborn.** Firstborn is a title. The firstborn does not necessarily mean somebody who is born first. It is supposed to designate that but not necessarily so. The blessing of the firstborn could go to the second born, or the blessing of the firstborn can go to a servant or a slave that the estate owner cherished. Maybe he does not want his kids to inherit the estate, so he names a slave or a servant as inheriting the blessings of the firstborn.

Here she gives birth to the firstborn, the inheritor, the one is going to inherit all things of God and all things of man. In all of our celebration we lose sight of the fact that Jesus did not come to be celebrated by the world. He was born in a stable. He was placed in a feeding trough after He was born. They did not go to Bethlehem because the Bible says to go there, something we have to take in consideration. They did not look up Scripture, or call the local scribes to say, "Where is Christ supposed to be born because she is just about ready to give birth?" They did not ask the location. They went to Bethlehem because Caesar Augustus' decree had everybody go to their home village and hometown in order to be registered.

So I am very impressed with the fact that God's Word was fulfilled with special difficulties and hardships that accompanied. They fulfilled the will of the Lord by submitting to and being under the decree of Caesar. They made the seventy to eighty mile trip on a donkey, her eight months pregnant, just for Him to be born in Bethlehem.

Verses 8-14, the proclamation of the birth of Christ. The choice for the proclamation, verse 8, **And the shepherds were in the same region living in fields and keeping watch by night over their flock. And behold an angel of the Lord stood over them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they feared with great fear.** So it is interesting that the announcement of the birth of Christ came to shepherds. Not religious leaders, not prominent politicians, but to shepherds.

So what is so special about shepherds? There are two kinds of people considered to be religiously unclean to the Jews. One were shepherds, and the second were tax collectors because they were considered to be traitors. Shepherds are considered unclean because they are living in the fields all the time. They have no way to get into town and go through the religious ceremonies in the temple in order to be qualified to participate. But God took unclean religious people and announced to them and revealed to them the birth of Christ.

The communication of the proclamation, verses 10-12, **And the angel said to them, Stop fearing: for look, I announce to you great joy, which will be to all people.** Literally, in the Greek text it is the imperative mood: **stop fearing**, stop continually fearing. Verse 11, **Because there was born to you today a Savior, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this will be a sign to you; you will find a baby having been wrapped in linen cloth, and lying in the feeding trough.** Again, poetically leaving it in literal translation. It is very poetical.

The chorus from heaven. **And suddenly their became with the angel a multitude of the host of heaven, praising God and saying, Glory to the highest to God, and upon the earth peace, among men of goodwill.** Notice how I read that last statement: *among men of goodwill*. There is no word *toward* in any texts other than the translation of the King James text. It is not *peace upon earth, goodwill toward men*. There is no word *toward*, it is *among*. But there are two ways to say it. There are two different words depending on which manuscript you look at. It is important to understand the most literal, the most accurate manuscript, because you can come to the wrong conclusions. And we already have come to the wrong conclusions about what this text says.

One translation will say, **Peace on earth among men of goodwill**, and another translation, **Peace on earth goodwill toward men**. Most of us are familiar with *peace on earth, goodwill toward men*. In fact, in the cartoon editorial section for Friday they had this saying, "Peace on earth, goodwill toward men," and there was a caption for the picture of Ukraine being bombed and torn apart. This is because that is how people apply it. Peace on earth goodwill toward men is implying universal peace and people use that for the promotion of universal peace. But it is arriving at a false conclusion. People say that Christ is the answer to the world's problems - peace on earth, goodwill toward men. Men will be able to share goodwill with one another if they surrender to Christ who has come, and whose birth was announced.

The problem with this is that if every single person in the world were saved, there still would not be any peace. Satan is still here, believers are still in the flesh, we still have sin in the world even though every person might be saved. There will not be peace upon the earth until Christ's second coming. So we can come to the false conclusion by using the slogan *peace upon earth, goodwill toward men*.

In reality it is literally the second translation which is the correct one, the more literal one, **peace on earth of goodwill of men**. So, peace to men of goodwill. The word *goodwill* means to *have a good reception toward someone, a favorable reception toward*. So, **peace on earth among men of goodwill** is the literal translation that should be applied and should be translated here. And it is individual. There is no peace on the earth until Christ's second coming, as I just said. The peace on earth that it is talking about in our text is individual, not universal. It is peace towards men of goodwill, not goodwill among men.

So not only because of the translation that we understand the peace is offered to individuals who are receptive to those receiving this peace, but also because of the word *peace* itself. The word *peace* is the word **εἰρήνη** (*eirēnē*) and it means *to be united or be at one with someone*. It has nothing to do with the tranquil feeling. It has nothing to do with good feelings. *Peace* is a word that denotes a person, to be at one with a person. We are talking about a spiritual peace that comes with Christ. In fact, it is personal, and it is individual.

Ephesians chapter 2 verse 14 identifies peace when Paul says, **He**, that is Christ, **is our peace**. Peace is a person. And being at peace with God, or experiencing the peace of God comes with being united with Christ, focused on Christ, fixed on Christ. To be united with Him in the midst of whatever my circumstances of life might be.

The Bible says before we came to know Christ - in Romans chapter 8 verse 7 - it says our natural man, our natural state was hostile towards God. No peace. We were not at peace with God. But after receiving Christ, Paul said in Romans 5:1, **Therefore having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.** So it is through Him that I made peace with God and God has made peace with me. I used to fight Him, but now I am at peace with Him through Jesus Christ my Lord. So the whole purpose of peace is to be united with Christ in all my circumstances and in all my situations.

As a matter fact, Paul said in Colossians chapter 3 verse 15, **Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart.** We are looking always to be at peace. We want to be at peace. There is only one peace and that is Christ. It is a spiritual peace. And even though my flesh, my human might be freaking out and having a rough time, peace comes with Christ and being focused with Him.

The Bible says in Proverbs 23 verse 7, **As a person thinks in his heart so is he.** Whatever my mind is focused on, that is what we are going to see in me. We are not talking about education. We are not talk about intellect. We are talking about whatever I am focused on. If I am going through rough hard times, if mentally I am focused on these hard times, the expression of my life will be the hard times, not the peace of Christ. So when I receive Christ, I am making peace with God. Not making peace with my circumstances. Not making peace with my human body, but with Christ. Again, this is not to be taken as universal peace. This is not to be taken as peace between people, even though we use it that way.

Jesus said in Matthew chapter 10 verses 34 to 38, **Do not think that I came to bring peace upon the earth. Jesus said that. I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at division against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's enemies will be those of his own household. He that loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: he the loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he that takes not his cross, and follows after Me, is not worthy of Me.** So He says there will be division. There will be those who receive Christ and there will be a division between those who do not. We are not talking about just belief, we are talking about following Christ. Like He said at the end, **the person who does not take up his cross and does not follow after Me, is not worthy of Me.** Following after Jesus.

So peace will not be between people, it is peace with Christ. Peace will not be between nations, not until Christ comes back at His second coming. Peace will be with Christ. I can actually experience the peace of Christ right here and now. Every day that I live here on the earth, by focusing on Christ, setting my mind and heart on Him, and trusting Him with all that I am, and all that I have. There will be difficulties. There will be hardships. It is not about playing a game of thinking positive and pretending that all things are fine, and nothing really has happened that is adverse. Christ wants us to be at peace. He wants us to experience His peace.

And I pray today that you will know the peace of Christ. Not just believe in Him but know His peace because He is our peace. He never changes - yesterday, today, and forever. We can trust Him with everything.

Let's close with prayer.