

Luke 2:1-7

- The birth of Christ -

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Introduction

- ❖ Let the celebration of Christmas lead to a renewed worship of God the Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ❖ “Do not be afraid. **I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.** Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2:10-11).
- ❖ It is remarkable that during Christmas especially the Western world is longing for happiness and peace. Most people spend a lot of time with their families and attend church services.
 - People love nativity scenes, the special exhibitions, particularly during the Christmas season, representing the scene of the birth of Jesus. These exhibitions often show an ox and a donkey, although they are not mentioned in the Lukan narrative. They belong to widespread folk-religion.
- ❖ Although the story of the birth of Christ is probably the best-known story in the world, it is important to preach about these words again and again. It is embedded in the whole of the Christian Scriptures. Jesus Christ is the promised one, who conquered sin and evil. He overcame death by his resurrection. He is Son of God and son of man.
 - It all started with Genesis 3:15, where the Lord God cursed the serpent, the devil, Satan. “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he¹ will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”
 - The prophet Isaiah comforted the oppressed people of Israel with the following words: “**For to us a child is born**, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his

¹ Revelation 12:1-7 shows this war between the offspring and the serpent, the dragon.

shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this." (Isa 9:6-7).

- All the titles are royal epithets.
- God became man: "Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!" (Phil 2:5–8)
- And: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14).

Literary and historical context

- ❖ Luke wrote an introduction to his gospel:
 - "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully **investigated** everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus" (Lk 1:1-3).
 - Luke was writing for an audience with a Roman-Greek background. He gave a historical account. It is probable that he met Mary and spoke with her.²
- ❖ The story of the birth of Jesus Christ belongs to the introductory chapters of this gospel:

Lk 1:1-4	Preface – introduction
Lk 1:5-25	The announcement of the birth of John the Baptist
Lk 1:26-38	The announcement of the birth of Jesus
Lk 1:39-56	Mary meets Elisabeth; song of Mary
Lk 1:57-80	Birth, circumcision and naming of John the Baptist; song of Zechariah
Lk 2:1-21	Birth, circumcision and naming of Jesus; the shepherds in the fields

² Luke 2:19 and 2:51: "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" might point to this first-hand information.

	of Ephrata; the song of the angels
Lk 2:22-40	Presentation of Jesus to the Lord; the song of Simeon, Anna.
Lk 2:41-52	The twelve-year-old Jesus dwells in the house of his Father.

Form and structure

- ❖ The form and structure of this passage have the character of a short historical narrative. Some personal and geographical names are mentioned. Luke refers to historical facts, a census and to Bethlehem, the town of David.
 - Nothing in this narrative reveals a great event. That will change when the angels appear to the shepherds in the fields of Ephrata. One of the angels said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger” (Lk 2:10-12).

Exposition

Verse 1-3

- ❖ **“In those days.”** These are the days of the birth of John the Baptist.
- ❖ **“Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.”**
 - Caesar Augustus was born Gaius Octavius (63 BC-AD 14). He gained sole control over the Roman world and in 27 BC the Roman Senate gave him the title Augustus. Augustus can be translated as "the illustrious one". It was a title of religious rather than political authority.³ Augustus established the Pax Romana,⁴ the Roman Peace. A monument, the Ara Pacis, which can still be visited in Rome, was commissioned by the Roman Senate on July 4, 13 BC to honour the return of Augustus to Rome after spending three years in Spain and France (Hispania and Gaul).⁵
 - The Roman Peace enhanced the spread of the gospel greatly. The apostles travelled over vast distances in the Roman Empire, due to good roads and protection.
 - The census Augustus decreed was for purposes of taxation. Luke mentions this census because he wants to explain why Joseph and Mary had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem while Mary was in the final months of her pregnancy. There is also some kind

³ Augustus. (n.d.). Retrieved December 9, 2015, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus#Octavian_becomes_Augustus

⁴ Pax Romana. (n.d.). Retrieved December 9, 2015, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pax_Romana

⁵ Ara Pacis (the Altar of Peace). (n.d.). Retrieved December 9, 2015, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ara_Pacis

of irony in this story. Augustus, ruler of a great empire, is a tool in the hand of God the Almighty. His decree is the cause that the eternal ruler of this world will be born in a small town, lying just south of Jerusalem.

- The first time such a census took place was while Quirinius was governor of Syria. This fact shows the historical interest of Luke.

Verse 4-5

- ❖ **“Joseph (...) went up.”** This is an idiomatic expression for travelling to Jerusalem and surroundings. Joseph might have owned some fields in Bethlehem as a descendant of David, and therefore, he had to make this journey because the possession of land was a primary source of tax income for the Romans.
- ❖ **“Bethlehem, the town of David.”** (Ruth 4:17-22; 1 Sam 16:-13) because he belonged to the house and line of David (Mic 5:2). God is fulfilling his promises to the house of David (Isa 11:1-2; Jer 23:5; 33:15; also Acts 13:22-23; Rev 5:5).
- ❖ **“who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.”** Joseph and Mary were not married yet and she is pregnant. At first, Joseph considered this a reason to divorce her quietly, because he didn't want to expose her to public disgrace (Mt 1:19). But “an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (Mt 1:20). Luke is silent about a marriage. After Mary gave birth to Jesus, Joseph and Mary are presented as a married couple (Lk 2:21-24 and 39-40) and Joseph is recognised as the father of Jesus (Lk 2:33, 2:41-48 and 3:23: “He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph”). Jesus was the son of Joseph by adoption.

Verse 6-7

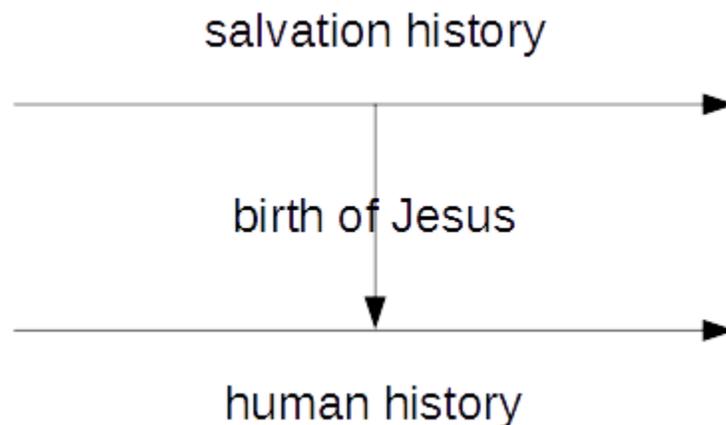
- ❖ **“She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”** After nine months of pregnancy, Jesus is born.
 - “You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and **will be called the Son of the Most High**. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; **his kingdom will never end.**”

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born **will be called the Son of God**” (Lk 1:31–35).
 - **IMPORTANT:**
The title “Son of God” means that Jesus is truly human. Only by becoming truly human can he save mankind. Truly human means in all righteousness and holiness (1 Co 1:31; Eph 4:24). Because he is truly human, he is also the perfect image of God. He is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15).
 - He entered this world and became like all of us, identifying himself with all human beings including Adam and Eve, who were created unto the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27).
 - He is God incarnate as the second Adam and the new Israel. The WORD became flesh (Jn 1:14-15).

- ❖ Mary gave birth to Jesus. She wrapped him in cloths, a sign of her motherly care. The account of Jesus' birth is spare in the extreme.⁶ Where was Jesus born? In a stable? We don't know. The only thing we know that there was no room for them at the inn. The manger was the sign for the shepherds (Lk 2:8-20). It was *their* manger and they were out in the fields that night. They knew where to look for the baby (Lk 2:12). The manger was not a sign of contempt on the part of the residents of Bethlehem for a pregnant woman on the point of delivering a baby. Luke only explains why the child was placed in a manger.
 - Roman readers wouldn't have been surprised by this account. They knew the story of Romulus and Remus, founders of the city of Rome. The twins were abandoned, fed by a she-wolf and finally found by a shepherd.

Application

- ❖ What is the relevance of the history of the nativity of Christ?
 - We need to be reminded of the salvation history which began when the first man and his wife (Adam and Eve) sinned for the first time (Gen 3:1-6). The salvation history and the history of this world will come to its end when Jesus Christ will return.
 - The history of this world is full of brokenness between nations and between individuals, visible in wars of the past and present, poverty and wealth, sickness and health, love and hate.
 - The preacher should spend some time mentioning the troubles people are facing. It shows that all of us need salvation. It shows that this world needs salvation. When we celebrate Christmas, it is therefore important not only to pay attention to personal salvation of individual believers (Jn 3:16) but also to pay attention to the need of this world with all its religious, political, racial, economic and environmental problems, because Jesus Christ is Lord of this world. He received all power (Mt 28:18-20) as the heir of king David.



- This simplified drawing will help us to understand Luke 2:1-7 better.

⁶ Nolland, J. (1989, p. 105)

- Augustus was part of human history. He neither knew nor believed in the God of Israel, the Creator of heaven and earth. He was the high priest or Pontifex Maximus,⁷ which was the most important position in religious Rome. The emperor was not aware of salvation history. The Roman world of gods and goddesses didn't need salvation, only pleasing offerings. Unaware of the God of Israel, Augustus played a crucial role in salvation history.
- This is true of all human history. Kings, presidents, governments, nations, the UN all are part of human history and play a more or less significant role. Most of them are secular and not aware of the fact that God acts upon history and will bring human history to an end when Christ will return (Mt. 28:18-20) and justice will be done. At the same time, there is that other history, salvation history.
 - Look at the contrast between Emperor Augustus and Jesus Christ:

AUGUSTUS	JESUS CHRIST
He became emperor through family relationships, power, intrigues, murder, violence, manipulation, politics	He became Lord by taking the nature of a servant, humbling himself and being obedient unto death, even death on the cross (Phil 2:5-11).
Augustus added the title <i>Divi Filius</i> (Son of the Divine) to his name following the deification of Julius Caesar. ⁸	Jesus was declared <i>Son of God</i> by God the Father (Lk 1:31-35; Lk 3:22).
He was a temporary ruler, ruling the Roman Empire.	He is the eternal Lord, ruling by designation the Kingdom of God, the throne of David.

- This comparison can be extended to all human power and authority.
- Jesus Christ is not elected by a democratic process but designated by God himself.
 - He is not elected by making pleasing political promises, but by serving and suffering and becoming the rejected one, the crucified one.
- ❖ He entered this world like all of us, identifying himself with all human beings including Adam and Eve, who were created unto the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27).
 - “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Heb 2:14–15).
 - The story of the nativity shows God's faithfulness to his promises.
 - It shows God's love and mercy for fallen mankind (Jn 3:16).

⁷ An image of a statue showing Augustus as Pontifex Max is found at: (n.d.). Retrieved December 9, 2015, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontifex_Maximus

⁸ (n.d.). Retrieved December 14, 2015, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus#Name>

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold him
Born the King of Angels:
O come, let us adore Him, (3×)
Christ the Lord.

God of God, light of light,
Lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
Very God, begotten, not created:
O come, let us adore Him, (3×)
Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of Heaven above!
Glory to God, glory in the highest:
O come, let us adore Him, (3×)
Christ the Lord.

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory given!
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!
O come, let us adore Him, (3×)
Christ the Lord.

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