

The Birth of Jesus

Luke 2:1-7

- A. Government involvement (2:1-3)
- B. Absolutely everyone complied (2:4-5)
- C. God's bigger purpose happened (2:6-7)

A. Government involvement (2:1-3)

1. (vs. 1) Luke explained, “Now in those days,” it happened (Ἐγένετο – Egeneto) that “a decree (δόγμα – dogma),” that is, “an imperial declaration,” probably very much like an executive order in our government, and this one was not lacking in authority as it “went out from Caesar (Καίσαρος – a proper name & then a title) Augustus (Αὐγούστου – a title).” The decree was “that a census (ἀπογράφω – apographō – enter into a list, register) be taken of all the inhabited earth (πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην – pasan

1. (cont.) tēn oikoumenēn),” which in reality meant, “the world as (an) administrative unit, the Roman Empire” (BDAG).
2. (vs. 2) Luke explains that “This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.” “Critics of the Scriptures say that Luke made historical errors citing that Quirinius did not govern Syria during the reign of Caesar Augustus. However evidence exists that Quirinius may have ruled Syria on two separate occasions. The census here would correspond to the first of the two. Accordingly, Luke

2. (cont.) records a second census of this area in Acts 5:37 which probably took place in AD 6–7” (GNTC – AL VALDÉS).
3. (vs. 3) It was not like people could opt out of the census; “And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city,” “the place of their ancestral lineage or beginnings—not necessarily their actual birthplace” (GNTC – AL VALDÉS).

Roman Emperors in New Testament Times

Augustus (27 B.C.–A.D. 14)

Ordered the census that involved Joseph and Mary going to Bethlehem (Luke 2:1)

Tiberias (A.D. 14–37)

Jesus ministered and was crucified under his reign (Luke 3:1; 20:22, 25; 23:2; John 19:12, 15)

Caligula (A.D. 37–41)

Claudius (A.D. 41–54)

An extensive famine occurred in his reign (Acts 11:28). He expelled Jews from Rome, including Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2).

Nero (A.D. 54–68)

He persecuted Christians, including the martyrdoms of Paul and Peter. He is the Caesar to whom Paul appealed for a fair trial (Acts 25:8, 10–12, 21; 26:32; 27:24; 28:19).

Galba (A.D. 68–69)

Otho (A.D. 69)

Vitellius (A.D. 69)

Vespasian (A.D. 69–79)

Crushed the Jewish revolt, and his son Titus destroyed the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70.

B. Absolutely everyone complied (2:4-5).

1. (vs. 4) This verse is a small study in geography. “Joseph also went up (south in direction) from Galilee from the city of Nazareth (1138 ft.), to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem (360 ft.).” To the Jews, Judea and Jerusalem (2474 ft.) were “up” from everywhere, making possible concepts that sound strange to our ears like “up south” and “down north.” And Joseph went there, “because he was of the house and family of David.” “House” means “a whole clan or tribe of people” 6

2. (vs. 5) descended fr. a common ancestor, house = descendants, nation, (in a) transferred sense from that of a single family.” Joseph went there, “in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.” Mary was apparently of the same family as Joseph and Luke’s genealogy suggests that (Lk. 3:23-38). We already saw in Lk. 1:27a, Mary was “a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph” and that the meaning of the Greek word for “engaged (μνηστεύω)” is to “*woo and win, betroth.*” Even in arranged marriages there is very

2. (cont.) likely some wooing and maybe winning that goes on. The thing that is extraordinary about this engagement is that Mary was with child, that is, pregnant, an utterly unique circumstance, inasmuch as she had had no contact with any man whatsoever, including Joseph, and he certainly knew that (Mt. 1:18-19). An angelic visit cleared things up for Joseph (vv. 20-25), just as it already had for Mary in Lk. 1:34-38.





C. God's bigger purpose happened (2:6-7).

1. (vs. 6) Ostensibly, Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem to register for the census, but God had a much bigger purpose. So, "While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth." In order for prophecy to be fulfilled, Jesus had to be born in Bethlehem. Even the religious leaders knew that. See Mt. 2:1-6. Is it not remarkable all the things that had to happen, otherwise unnoticed by mankind, for that prophecy to be fulfilled?

2. (vs. 7) The prophecy was fulfilled; “And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

➤ Since Justin Martyr, “Traditionally Christians have believed that the manger or feeding trough in which Mary laid the baby Jesus was in a cave. However most homes in Israel had two parts, one for the family and another for the household animals. It is possible that this was the location of the manger” (TC).

- The inn itself would have been, “poor enough at best” (A. T. R.), nothing to write home about.