

Luke 2:1-20: In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. & all went to be registered, each to his own town. & Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house & lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. & while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. & she gave birth to her firstborn son & wrapped him in swaddling cloths & laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. & in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. & an angel of the Lord appeared to them, & the glory of the Lord shone around them, & they were filled with fear. & the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. & this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths & lying in a manger." & suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God & saying, "Glory to God in the highest, & on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem & see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." & they went with haste & found Mary & Joseph, & the baby lying in a manger. & when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. & all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. & the shepherds returned, glorifying & praising God for all they had heard & seen, as it had been told them.

Intro: This is the true, historical story of the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! This is Christmas!

1. This Is True History – It Really Happened

Caesar Augustus was the 1st emperor of the Roman Empire after Julius Caesar died; Reigned: 27 BC -14 AD. He issued a decree for a census. Joseph and Mary traveled to a real city – Bethlehem (5,778 miles east of Philadelphia)

2. Men Are Harsh, Wicked, And Greedy, And They Take And Take

Romans 3:10-12: None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.

Kent Hughes: Rome and Augustus had bludgeoned every foe into submission. There was “peace,” but it was a dark peace – a Hitler’s peace – and no man or woman or boy or girl could say a word against it without fearfully looking over his or her shoulder. Caesar Augustus’s relentless arm stretched out to squeeze its tribute even in a tiny village at the far end of the Mediterranean. Thus it came about that a village carpenter and his expectant teenage bride were forced to travel to his hometown to be registered for taxation. It was a miserable journey. Mary was full term, which forced a slow, rolling gait as she walked those eighty miles. Perhaps, if she was fortunate, she had borrowed an animal to carry her. But whatever their situation, she traveled in the dust and cold of winter, bearing the distressing knowledge that she might have her first baby far from home, from her mother, and from nearly everyone who cared about her.

Nick Batzig: Surely we are meant to take note of the fact that God sent His Son into the world at a time when the most powerful political leader was levying a hefty taxation. The principle is clear, men take and take while God gives and gives. God gave His Son to the world, at a time when the greatest ruler in the world was taking as much as he possibly could from the people. (May our knowledge of God move us to give and give!!)

3. Israel Was Suffering From This Roman Oppression Because Of Their Sin

Deut 28:47-50: Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness & gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger & thirst, in nakedness, & lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you. The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young.

Nick Batzig: Israel was under Roman rule on account of their former rebellion against God. When Christ was born, He submitted Himself to the consequences of Israel's sin.

God's Mercy Is More: Psalm 107:17-19: Some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction; they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

4. God Will Make Sure His People Are In The Right Place At The Right Time

a. God put Mary and Joseph where they needed to be: God so worked in history to move Augustus to call for a census (what Augustus meant for evil, God meant for good!) so that Mary and Joseph would be in Bethlehem!

Micah 5:2: Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, *Yet* out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth *are* from of old, From everlasting.

Bethlehem means "House of Bread" Jesus is the bread of life! **John 6:35:** Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

b. God put Mary and Joseph together so Jesus would be Who He should be: Jesus is a descendant of David according to the flesh: **Verse 4:** Joseph . . . was of the house and lineage of David

- **Luke 1:32:** He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David

- **2 Samuel 7:12-13:** I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

c. God ensured Mary was a virgin so Jesus would be Who He should be: Matthew 1:23: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). (Truly man, sinless man, truly God)

d. God is in absolute control of all events in history, causing everything to happen exactly according to His plan: Proverbs 21:1: The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.

- **Daniel 4:34-35:** all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, & he does according to his will among the host of heaven & among the inhabitants of the earth; & none can stay his hand

- **Isaiah 46:9-10:** remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning

- **Ephesians 1:11:** who works all things according to the counsel of his will

e. God is in absolute control of all events in history, causing everything to happen exactly according to His plan in every smallest and biggest detail of your life: Ligon Duncan: That's such an important lesson for us to learn, because you see, God's not only at work in the timing of the birth of Jesus Christ; the Lord Jesus Christ says that God is concerned about every detail and aspect of your life. In fact, in the Sermon on the Mount, He'll say that not a hair can fall from your head apart from the will of your heavenly Father. He's that concerned about every aspect, about every circumstance, every detail of your life, and He's in the timing of your life even if you don't sense it or realize it. You know, it's an irony that sometimes the very time that you need to believe most that God is involved in the timing of your life is the time when it's hardest to believe that He's involved in the timing of your life. And so the very surprising nature of the timing of the coming of the Christ ought to remind us to trust God with that. [There's] a wonderful saying about that. "He may not come when you want Him, but He's always on time." You may think He's late, but He's always on time. His timing is perfect. Luke's reminding you of that. Luke's reminding you that He's involved in the details, even of the place of Jesus' birth here. He's displaying His supreme sovereignty in getting Joseph and Mary from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea so that prophecy

can be fulfilled, so that there are no falling words in the promises and prophecies of God. And He does this again through this decree made by the Roman emperor, who has no idea that he's fulfilling the will of God, but he is. And though the world would have looked at his kingdom and said his decisions are the most important decisions in the world, yet what was actually going on through his decree was something far more important than him and his kingdom, his purposes. God's purposes were far more important than Caesar's purposes, and Caesar was accomplishing the will of God even though he didn't know it.

5. God Delights To Use The Weak, Small, And Rejected In The World To Show Off His Great Power

a. Mary and Joseph, the weak and small of the world: Kent Hughes: Seen through everyday logic, Joseph and Mary were insignificant nobodies from a nothing town. They were peasants. They were poor, uneducated, of no account. But she understood who she was and who God was.

Andrew Peterson Song, "Labor Of Love": It was not a silent night; There was blood on the ground; You could hear a woman cry; In the alleyways that night; On the streets of David's town; And the stable was not clean; And the cobblestones were cold; And little Mary full of grace; With tears upon her face; Had no mother's hand to hold

Philip Ryken: Everything we know about the birth of Jesus points to obscurity, indignity, pain, and rejection.

1 Corinthians 1:25-29: For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men . . . But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Luke 1:46-48, 51-52: And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant . . . ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; ⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate

God's calling you in your weakness may put you in some surprising circumstances: Ligon Duncan: You know, just a few weeks ago we were reading the word of the angel to Mary, "Greetings, highly favored one! The Lord is with you." If we had never read the story before, we would have been very surprised to learn that only a few sentences later after the words of the angel – "Greetings to you, highly favored one! The Lord is with you" – that that very same woman was going to hear "There is no room in the inn." Those don't go together! "Greetings, highly favored one..." (Sorry, ma'am. We gave your room away, but there is a cattle stall out back.) We would not have guessed that when the angel said, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest," that it would be said of Him "...they laid Him in a feeding trough for cattle." Those don't go together, do they? I mean, those circumstances seem to belie the power and comfort of God's words of blessing and promise and favor. "I'm with you...I'm with you," the Lord says. "I'll never leave you or forsake you." (But there's no place for you to spend the night.) "He shall be called the Son of the Highest." (Put Him right over there where the oxen eat their straw.)

I understand the uniqueness of this, of course, in redemptive history, my friends. But isn't this the way it is with believers in all generations? The Lord says to you, 'I love you. I will never leave you or forsake you.' (But you still hear the doctor say, "It's cancer." Or worse, "It's cancer; I'm sorry; I can't do anything.") "I'll never leave you or forsake you," the Lord says. (But some of you hear, "I just don't love you anymore." Or, "I've found somebody else.") "I'll never leave you or forsake you." ('Dad, I'm pregnant.') "I'll never leave you or forsake you." ('Mom, I hate you, and I never want to see you again.') "I'll never leave you or forsake you." ('Mrs. Jones, on behalf of a grateful country, I want to extend our deepest sympathies and appreciation, because your son has given the ultimate sacrifice for his people.') The circumstances seem to negate the blessing and the promise, don't they? And when those circumstances come, you want to say, 'Lord, I wish I could just have an angel come to me and tell me that You love me and that You care for me, because if that would happen I'd believe. If that would happen, I'd believe. I wouldn't be here hanging on by my fingernails in these circumstances trying to figure out why is this

happening to me. What is going on in my life?’

Well, my friends, an angel had come to Mary and to Joseph and had told them of the Lord’s blessing, but they’re right here having to hang on by their fingernails in the circumstances into which they’ve been placed. You know, there are a lot of you who think that your circumstances show that God’s promises can’t be true. Two thousand years before that thought ever entered into your head, God has already shown you believers who you wouldn’t wish the circumstances of their lives on your worst enemy. And those circumstances did not belie the truth and the power of His promise. No, He was not going to display the power of His promise in the midst of delightful circumstances; He was going to display the power of His promises in the worst circumstances that you can imagine.

Some of you think that circumstances can ruin your life. Some of you think that your circumstances have already ruined your life. But circumstances can’t ruin your life. The only thing that can ruin your life is the way that you respond to circumstances. Because in this passage God is saying to us there is no circumstance where My power cannot be displayed. There is no circumstance where My promises are trumped. So hear Me loud and clear: Trust Me. Believe Me. And when “Why?” is bouncing around the insides of your skull, add to that “why?” this question: “Lord, how can I glorify You in this? I don’t know what You’re doing. I don’t know what You’re doing, but I know that You want me to know You more and that You want me to love You more, and that You want me to glorify You more. So in this, how can I glorify You? And, Lord, in this, whether I am the victim of a grievous wrong or whether I am the perpetrator of the grievous wrong, show me my sin. I know You want me to know my need more. I know You want me to know my dependence more. I know that You want me to know the necessity of the gospel more, and my need for mercy and grace more. So in the midst of the place that You have me now, this place that I don’t want to be and that I don’t understand, show me my sin.

And then, Lord God, don’t stop there. Show me my Savior. Show me Your salvation. Show me the gospel of grace, where I am right now. I don’t know what else You’re doing here. I don’t know whether I’ll know what else You’re doing here a few years later. [I may not know] what You’re doing here until glory. But whether I do or not, show me Yourself. Help me live for Your glory. Show me my sin, and show me the Savior.” Aren’t you glad that people who saw and heard angels have to do the same thing that you and I, who have not seen and heard angels, have to do? We have to believe God’s Word when all the circumstances don’t make sense. And when we do, His power is always displayed in our weakness.

b. Shepherds, the rejected of the world, are the first to hear about Jesus’ birth and visit Him: Why shepherds?

(1) King David was a shepherd, and Jesus is the greater Son of David Who will reign forever.

(2) **Jer 33:13-15:** in the cities of Judah, flocks shall again pass under the hands of the one who counts them, says the LORD. “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel & the house of Judah. In those days & at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David”

(3) **Philip Ryken:** Shepherds were outcasts . . . they lived out in the fields, there were unable to keep the ceremonial law, and thus they were treated as unclean. They were regarded as liars and thieves, which is why their testimony was inadmissible in a court of law. Shepherds were despised. With the exception of lepers, they were the lowest class of men in Israel.

Jesus came for the outcast, rejected, and lowly. Jesus came for sinners! Jesus came for you! **GOSPEL!**

6. Jesus Was Rejected From The Beginning To The End Of His Life

There was no place for them in the inn: there wasn’t even room for Jesus to be born in a normal place!

(1) Guesthouse where travelers stayed; It was full, so they had to stay in a place/room where the animals stayed

(2) **Garland:** Luke uses that same word . . . translated “inn” (kataluma) in [Luke] 22:11 (Mark 14:14) to refer to “the guest room” where Jesus and his disciples eat the Last Supper. Luke does not use here the word for “inn” (pandoxeion), which appears in [Luke] 10:34 in the parable of the good Samaritan. Peasant homes normally consisted of two rooms, with one used exclusively for guests. The family “cooked, ate, slept, and lived” in the main room, and any animals were also brought in for the night and kept at the lower level of the living room, where the feeding trough would be.” (Kenneth Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*)

The Point: There was no room! There’s no room in the peasant house, inn, quarters, guesthouse! Jesus should be the center of attention! Royal babies are born in the best hospitals with the best care! He’s rejected, man of sorrows

Philip Ryken: Jesus was rejected all through his ministry, right up to the very end. He was driven out of his hometown. His family thought he was so crazy that they practically disowned him . . . The religious leaders scoffed at him, rejecting his claims and growing to hate him, until finally they tried to do away with him altogether. It wasn’t just Bethlehem – there was never enough room for Jesus. As one commentator put it, “When Christ first came among us we pushed him into an outhouse; and we have done our best to keep him there ever since.”

7. Jesus Was Truly Man – Born Like Any Other Baby

Mary gave birth to her firstborn son. Jesus was wrapped in swaddling cloths: Wrapped up to comfort him, reminds him of the womb. Jesus was born like a normal child! He’s a human being! He’s a man! The God-Man!

Ezekiel 16:4: And as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. - Jesus is the true and better Israel!

8. Jesus Was Humiliated At His Birth And At His Death

Jesus was laid in a manger: Again, the humility! Jesus Christ was born and laid in the feeding trough of a cow!

J. C. Ryle: We see here the grace and condescension of Christ. Had He come to save mankind with royal majesty, surrounded by His Father’s angels, it would have been an act of undeserved mercy. Had He chosen to dwell in a palace, with power and great authority, we should have had reason enough to wonder. But to become poor as the very poorest of mankind, and lowly as the very lowliest – this is a love that passeth knowledge. It is unspeakable and unsearchable . . . Never let us forget that through his humiliation Jesus has purchased for us a title to glory.

Most popular depictions of the nativity scene portray Jesus lying in a wooden feeding trough. But this is not accurate. It would have been a stone trough like the one pictured above.

Wayne Stiles: Thanks to Christmas cards and holiday movies, we usually think of Christ's manger as a wooden crib with straw. But it wasn't so. Mangers were carved from stone, like the one above. Archaeologists have found mangers at a number of sites in Israel, such as Megiddo, Tekoa, and Ramat Rahel.

This is amazing! At His birth, the God-Man, Jesus Christ, was wrapped in linen swaddling cloths, and laid in a stone manger where (probably) no one had ever been laid (Luke 2:7). At His death, Jesus was buried in a borrowed stone tomb, wrapped in linen cloths, and laid on a stone slab where no one had ever been laid (Luke 23:53).

How appropriate that the great Messiah & King of kings and LORD of lords, the One Who provides eternal living water (John 4:14) and spiritual food (John 6:35), was laid as a baby in a watering trough - in a feeding trough.

Sinclair Ferguson says that Jesus was laid in a feeding trough because He came to feed the spiritually hungry with good things (Luke 1:53).

From the very beginning, the events of the life of Jesus Christ point to and foreshadow the most important part of His life: His sacrificial death for sinners where He suffered the wrath of God to make atonement for their sins and His resurrection from the dead where He conquered sin, death, and hell forever! Hallelujah! What a Savior!

9. Today There Is Joyous News Of Salvation For All People To The Praise And Glory Of God

Luke 2:10-20: & the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for **all the people**. For **unto you** is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is **Christ the Lord**. & this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths & lying in a manger." & suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God & saying, "**Glory to God** in the highest, & on earth **peace** among those with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem & see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." & they went with haste & found Mary & Joseph, & the baby lying in a manger. & when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. & all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. & the shepherds returned, glorifying & praising God for all they had heard & seen, as it had been told them.

Habakkuk 3:17-18: Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the **stalls [phatnai, manger]**, yet I will rejoice in the **LORD [Kurios]**, I will be **joyful [kairo]** in God my **Savior [Sotair]**.

Luke 2:10-12: And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great **joy [kara]** that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a **Savior [Sotair]**, who is Christ the **Lord [Kurios]**. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a **manger [phatnai]**."

Habakkuk, though he lost everything valuable and everything that could feed him and his family and give them life and sustenance – though nothing was in his manger or stall, he was determined to rejoice in the LORD his Savior!

In Jesus, that which is most valuable has come in the manger, in the stall! He Who can fill the hungry with good things (Luke 1:53) has come in the manger! Jesus is everything! Jesus is everything valuable! Jesus is the Bread of Life Who feeds and sustains us! Jesus is in the manger – in the stall! Jesus is the LORD our Savior in whom we rejoice with exceedingly great joy! And if we, like Habakkuk, lose everything else, Jesus is our all in all and will satisfy us with fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore!

Habakkuk writes this while waiting patiently for deliverance from his and Israel's enemies (Hab. 3:16), just like Zechariah, Simeon, Anna, and all Israel were waiting to be saved from their enemies (Luke 1:71, 74). And before this, Habakkuk also wrote about the coming of God with bright light and the earth full of praise (Hab. 3:3-4). God has come - Jesus Christ is God, and He came in the bright light of that star and with the praises of men and of angels!

Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all of Habakkuk's hopes. He's the fulfillment of all of our hopes!

For Unto Us Is Born This Day
A Savior Taking Sin Away
Upholds The World In Every Way
While Lying On A Bed Of Hay
The God-Man Glory Does Display
Peace He'll Bring And For It Pay
His Body Enemies Would Slay

He Bore God's Wrath Then Rose Sunday
To Save All Peoples Gone Astray
So Trust The Son And Don't Delay
Confess Your Sins And To Him Pray
He'll Save And Cause You To Obey
Good News Great Joy's Yours Today!