

## A Light in the Darkness

Luke 2:1-14

December 31, 2006

### Gospel Lesson

<sup>1</sup>And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. <sup>3</sup>So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. <sup>4</sup>Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, <sup>5</sup>to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. <sup>6</sup>So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. <sup>7</sup>And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

<sup>8</sup>Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. <sup>10</sup>Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. <sup>11</sup>For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: <sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"(1)

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Caesar Augustus adopted his grandnephew, which was Julius Caesar. After his uncle's murder, Caesar ruled with Mark Anthony and Lepidus, then for 40 years, he ruled as the first Roman Emperor. It was during his reign that Jesus was born.

When it says, "all the world should be registered." it really was only the 27 provinces that were ruled by the Roman Senate and the emperor. This census was taken to help in the collection of the taxes. The Jews didn't have to serve in the military, but they did have to pay taxes. It all fell into God's plan to have His Son born in Bethlehem. Bethlehem is a small town filled with an oppressed people, the Jews, surrounded by the affluent Romans. Everyone thought that the Messiah would come and free them from the Romans and be an earthly king. But, God came as a small baby, to a poor family, and was laid in a manger, which is a food trough for animals. The people would have expected Him to come and be surrounded by royalty and worldly riches. In coming to us in such a lowly way, God is telling us that He is here for all people from every walk of life. From the poorest to the richest, we are all the same in His eyes.

Poor Mary, I can't imagine how hard it would have been for her to ride a donkey for 70 miles and just about ready to deliver a baby. It's hard enough to get around when you are that close to

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1 *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) 1982.

delivering a baby, let alone ride a donkey for that many miles. Then her disappointment when they kept hearing that there was no room for them in the inn. She knew she was carrying God's Son, I wonder what she thought when they finally found a place to stay in a stable, and had to place Jesus in a food trough for a bed. She was so young, only thirteen years old, to have such a big responsibility, my heart goes out to her.

There was no midwife to help Mary at the time of Jesus birth, so she wrapped Jesus in swaddling clothes. It is said that this could also be a sign of what was to come, with the wrapping of Jesus body in the strips of cloth for His burial.

When we think of Christmas, visions of snow, Christmas carols, children all excited, a warm fire and lots of food come to mind. However the reality of where Jesus was born and the area He was born is a far cry from what we experience. The king flew into a rage and had the male babies killed to save his throne, because he thought this child threatened his reign. There were lies, fear and deceit and a very scared little holy family, that just barley escaped King Herod's wrath. We dream of a much different scene than the reality of what Jesus was born into.

Next we hear the story of the shepherds out in the field watching over their sheep. In your mind imagine a quiet chilly night, with clear skies and lots of stars and one very bright star that you hadn't seen before. Then all of a sudden an angel appears and a glow from the Lord brightens the area and the angel says, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. <sup>11</sup>For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." The shepherds must have been afraid to see such a sight, how do you think you would feel if an angel came to you? Would you expect God's Son to be revealed first to shepherds out in a field, or to the rich people in town? Once again God shows us that He has come for people of all walks of life, not just for a chosen few.

After the first scare of the angel coming to tell the shepherds of the birth of Jesus, the sky was then full of heavenly hosts saying, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" They must have stood there in awe at the magnificent sight and the wonder of the news that their promised Messiah was born. This brings to my mind a slight chance to feel what they may have felt; I think of Christmas Eve and singing Silent Night in the candlelight.

The following is a message I got from an email. It's a message from God to His children:

It has come to my attention that many of you are upset that folks are taking My name out of the season. Maybe you've forgotten that I wasn't actually born during this time of the year and that it was some of you're predecessors who decided to celebrate My birthday on what was actually a time of pagan festival. Although I do appreciate being remembered anytime.

How I personally feel about this celebration can probably be most easily understood by those of you who have been blessed with children of your own. I don't care what you call the day. If you want to celebrate My birth, just GET ALONG AND LOVE ONE ANOTHER. Now, having said that, let Me go on.

If it bothers you that the town in which you live doesn't allow a scene depicting My birth, then just get rid of a couple of Santa's and snowmen and put in a small Nativity scene on your own front lawn. If all My followers did that,

there wouldn't be any need for such a scene on the town square because there would be many of them all around town.

Stop worrying about the fact that people are calling the tree a holiday tree instead of a Christmas tree. It was I who made all trees. You can and may remember Me anytime you see any tree. Decorate a grape vine if you wish; I actually spoke of that one in a teaching explaining who I am in relation to you and what each of our tasks are. If you have forgotten that one, look up John 15:1-8.

If you want to give Me a present in remembrance of My birth here is my wish list. Choose something from it.

1. Instead of writing protest letters objecting to the way My birthday is being celebrated, write letters of love and hope to soldiers away from home. They are terribly afraid and lonely this time of year. I know, they tell Me all the time.
2. Visit someone in a nursing home. You don't have to know them personally. They just need to know that someone cares about them.
3. Instead of writing George complaining about the wording on the cards his staff send out, why don't you write and tell him that you'll be praying for him and his family this year. Then follow up. It will be nice hearing from you again.
4. Instead of giving your children a lot of gifts you can't afford and they don't need, spend time with them. Tell them the story of My birth, and why I came to live with you down here. Hold them in your arms and remind them that I love them.
5. Pick someone that has hurt you in the past and forgive him or her.
6. Did you know that someone in your town will attempt to take their own life this season because they feel so alone and hopeless? Since you don't know who that person is, try giving everyone you meet a warm smile; it could make the difference. Also, you might consider supporting the local Hot-Line: they talk with people like that every day.
7. Instead of nitpicking about what the retailer in your town calls the holiday, be patient with the people who work there. Give them a warm smile and a kind word. Even if they aren't allowed to wish you a "Merry Christmas," that doesn't keep you from wishing them one. Then stop shopping there on Sunday. If the store didn't make so much money on that day, they'd close and let their employees spend the day at home with their families.
8. If you really want to make a difference, support a missionary, especially one who takes My love and good news to those who have never heard My name. You may already know someone like that.
9. Here's a good one. There are individuals and whole families in your town who not only will have no "Christmas" tree, but neither will they have any presents to give or receive. If you don't know them, buy some food and a few gifts and

give them to the Marines, the Salvation Army or some other charity that believes in Me and they will make the delivery for you.

10. Finally if you want to make a statement about your belief in and loyalty to Me, then behave like a Christian. Don't do things in secret that you wouldn't do in My presence. Let people know by your actions that you are one of mine.

P.S. Don't forget; I am God and can take care of Myself. Just love Me and do what I have told you to do. I'll take care of all the rest. Check out the list above and get to work; time is short. I'll help you, but the ball is now in your court. And do have a most blessed Christmas with all those whom you love - and remember...I LOVE YOU.

Amen.