

Bite Size Bible Study

Advent – Luke pt 2 #192

By Pastor Lee

Luke continues his account of Jesus' birth by giving the events occurring during that time.

Around this time, Emperor Augustus issued an order for a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This registration, the first of its kind, took place when Quirinius was governing in Syria. Everyone went to be registered, each to his own town.

So Yosef, because he was a descendant of David, went up from the town of Natzeret in the Galil to the town of David, called Beit-Lechem, in Y'hudah to be registered, with Miryam, to whom he was engaged, and who was pregnant.

While they were there, the time came for her to give birth; and she gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him in cloth and laid him down in a feeding trough, because there was no space for them in the living-quarters. Luke 2:1-7 CJB

Luke squeezes a lot of information into these three paragraphs. Let's see if we can use cultural information to enlighten ourselves.

The trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem:

Reason: Caesar Augustus wanted a census – Why? TAXES!

This trip is approximately 85 miles and they walked. It has been estimated that it took from 4 to 7 days. They didn't go alone, as we see in the movies; they would have traveled with others that were headed to Jerusalem. The rest of the extended families of Mary and Joseph living in Nazareth would be of same lineage of David and would be going to Bethlehem for the same reason.

Mary probably did not ride a donkey. There would probably have been at least a few in the group that had carts and she could have ridden in the cart if/when she tired. But people were very used to walking during this period of history, and she was a young girl.

Arrival in Bethlehem:

The first misleading part of many translations is *that there was no room for them in the inn* (malon). Note that the Complete Jewish Bible says *there was no space for them in the living-quarters*.

The word (malon) can mean inn or dwelling-place. But since Bethlehem likely had a population of around 1000 during this time, it is unlikely that they had an inn. The *dwelling place* was most likely a relative's house.

Remember, Joseph and Mary would have had many relatives in Bethlehem that were from the line of David. But there were so many distant relatives of David coming to the city it is likely that most if not all of the guest rooms in the homes would have been filled. It would have been unthinkable to turn away family. So probably a place was made in the lower or separate area of the house where the animals were kept.

The birth:

In the movies we see Joseph scurrying from place to place to find lodging because Mary was beginning labor. This makes for good movies but it is unlikely that this is what actually occurred.

But the scripture says. "*While they were there*". This doesn't indicate that the delivery was eminent, only that while they were there, she did deliver.

In the movies, we see Mary and Joseph alone in a cave and she delivers Jesus alone. Again this makes for great drama and suspense but is far from the way it probably happened.

The birth of a child was considered "a gift from God" and the women in the house would have been all over the situation. The fact that the child was her first child, and a male no less, would have caused even more joy and excitement in the household.

So they wrapped him in cloth and laid him down in a feeding trough. Parents and midwives would wrap the newborn in swaddling cloths, which were long strips of cloth, to help the child's limbs to grow straight.

Mary would not have wanted to lay her infant on the dirt floor. Instead, the manger would be a convenient alternative: the hay was soft; it was up off the ground, and the sides tall enough to keep her child safely inside.

Mangers were located wherever livestock were kept. People who kept animals would keep their mangers well-supplied with fodder at all times so the animals would never go hungry. The animals could walk up to a manger at any time, and then spend long, leisurely hours feeding.

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