



## 4: The Greatest Gift (Luke 2:1-21)

When our past Christmas gifts lose their luster, the ancient Christmas story of Jesus continues to shine bright. Today we are reminded that **the Greatest Gift is God's Presence!**

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## teachingnotes

### Caesar Augustus & The Roman Census

**Luke 2:1-2** (NIV) In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken **of the entire Roman world**. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

The intent of a **census** was to enroll young men for military service or to aid in taxation of people in the empire. Jews were exempt from military service to the Roman empire, so this was about taxation. This **census** was taken **of the entire Roman world**. The Greek word used here (*oikoumenē*) is simply translated **earth/world**. This is how the KJV translates it: "that all the world should be taxed."

- The context always determines the meaning of the word. The context of this **census** pertains to those whom the Romans ruled over - not the barbarians and other nations the Romans were at war with. The translators of the NIV rightly interpret this as **the entire Roman world** (\*NET & CSB translate this as "empire") rather than just *world* as the KJV does.

**Caesar Augustus (Gaius Octavius)**, the 2nd emperor of the Roman Empire, was the adopted son of Julius Caesar. The Roman senate gave Octavius the title '**Augustus**' in 27 BC and he ruled until AD 14. He was succeeded by **Tiberius** (Lk 3:1). These are the 2 emperors during the life of Jesus.

**Caesar** means "emperor," while **Augustus** means, "revered," "honored," or "esteemed," - hence Octavius was **the Esteemed Emperor of the Roman Empire**. He ushered the *Pax Romana* (Latin meaning *Roman peace*). He is considered the most significant person in Roman history.

- Augustus developed a network of roads that ended up helping in spreading the gospel by Christian missionaries. Augustus declared that he had *he found Rome brick and left it marble*.
- Augustus also declared his deceased adoptive father - **Julius Caesar** - to be divine, & referred to himself as 'son of god'. Upon his death, the Senate declared Augustus a god.

### Journey to Bethlehem

**Luke 2:3-6** (NIV) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to **Bethlehem the town of David**, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, **the time came for the baby to be born,**

**Went up.** Luke the historian had the topography correct. Due to the height of Bethlehem (2,564 feet above sea level), travelers would go up from Nazareth (1,830 feet above sea level) to Bethlehem even though proceeding south.

We have seen the significance of this *family tree of David* several times in previous teachings.

700 years before the birth of Jesus, Micah prophesied that an important ruler would be born in Bethlehem.

**Micah 5:2** (NIV) But you, **Bethlehem** Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, **out of you will come for Me One who will be ruler over Israel**, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

## Birth of the King

**Luke 2:6-7** (NIV) While they were there, **the time came for the baby to be born**, and she gave birth to her firstborn, **a son**. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

The focus of the Christmas story is not on animals or angels, but on **the baby - a son**. There is reference to **cloths** and a **manger** - a feed trough.

- Bethlehem was a small town, not on a trade route, & unlikely to have any hotel near. Joseph was likely expecting to find refuge at a relative's home, but **the guest rooms** were already filled. Jesus was likely born in a lower level of his relative's home.
- Instead, Mary & Joseph would have to rest in the lower part of the house, the place where animals were kept at night.

## Shepherds, Angels, & the Savior

**Luke 2:8-12** (NIV) And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. **An angel of the Lord appeared** to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David **a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord**. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

The angel has come to bring **good news** which will **bring joy for all the people** who are humble enough to receive it. Jesus was no mere infant. And he's not just one among many in the family line of King David. The angels made sure the shepherds knew this. The **manger** was a signpost to the **Savior - the Messiah, the Lord**. For centuries those who believe the New Testament Scriptures have recognized that answering *Who is Jesus?* is the most important question one could answer.

## Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae

Dan Wallace, professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary - an expert in New Testament Greek manuscripts, tells us of a 6th century hand-written Greek copy of the Gospel of Matthew. The parchment is dyed purple - reserved for the Gospels. Every word on this parchment has been carefully written in silver...except for - **God, Jesus, Christ** [Messiah], & **Lord** - all in **GOLD**.

*These 6th century Christians believed what the 1st century shepherds believed...what WE should believe...*

## **BIG TRUTH: The Greatest Gift is God's Presence**

- Jesus is not just another prophet who **speaks for God**. Jesus is **God who speaks**.

## Seeing Him & Spreading the Word

**Luke 2:13-19** (NIV) Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "**Let's go to Bethlehem and see** this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and **the baby**, who was **lying in the manger**. **When they had seen him, they spread the word** concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

The shepherd's visit encouraged **Mary** & Joseph. They **treasured** all the things that happened and thought about them again, and again, and again. The **shepherds** couldn't keep silent, because God had come to Earth and **the greatest gift is God's Presence!**

## He Was Named Jesus

**Luke 2:20-21** (NIV) The shepherds returned, **glorifying and praising God** for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, **he was named Jesus**, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

**He was named Jesus** (Heb. *Yeshua*), meaning 'Yahweh is salvation'. **The greatest gift**, the fulfillment of Scripture, the infinite Creator - was now an infant. The One who would change the course of history weighed less than 10 pounds.

Quick look back to what the angel Gabriel told Joseph:

**Matthew 1:21** (NIV) She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name **Jesus**, because **He will save His people from their sins.**"

**Yeshua = "Yahweh saves" will save His people from sins.** THAT'S why Jesus came - to die for you...to save YOU from your sin! When you TRUST HIM...He will forgive you and live inside of you! And that's the greatest gift!

## **BIG TRUTH: The Greatest Gift is God's Presence**

- If you **don't know Jesus yet...what a great time to meet the King!** Turn from your sin & call out to Him! (Rom 10:9-13)
- If you **already know Jesus...**take your opportunities this Christmas to share Jesus with others & help your young ones be more thankful for Jesus than for Santa & gifts. (Use the discussion questions for more help).

### **heretoserveyou**

Have questions and need some help? ...real soon...how about now? Please **call** or **text** us soon!

- \* Contact **Jackie** (850-673-1582), **Christy** (850-673-9764), **Caleb** (864-315-8015), **Gary** (850-673-2507), **Betty** (850-973-3266), or another follower of Jesus soon!
- \* Or call our **deacons & wives: Alan & Christy Androski** (850-464-1428), **Steve & Debbie Bass** (850-673-7952), **Tim & Joni Hughey** (850-464-1156), **Mark & Dot Mancil** (850-253-5405), **Boss & Amelia Mulkey** (850-464-6717), or **Tom & Martha Waddail** (850-973-0011).

## **discussionquestions**

Take some time to discuss these questions with your family, friends, or group.

1. **Read Luke 2:3-6.** Then read the 700 year old prophecy from **Micah 5:2**. What is the significance of this prophecy being fulfilled? How does the description in Micah fit the person of Jesus?
2. Have you ever heard of Jesus being born in a house or a cave instead of a stable/barn? What is the danger in getting caught up in animals, a stable, or an inn keeper (not mentioned in Scripture)? Why is *HOW* it happened not as important as *THAT* it happened?
3. What does **Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae** (6th century NT manuscript of Matthew) tell us about how these Christians viewed Jesus? (Remember that all words are written in silver on purple parchment...with the exception of *God, Jesus, Christ, Lord* - written in GOLD)
4. **Read Matthew 1:21.** Why did Jesus come to earth and what does that say about 1) His love for sinners & 2) His hatred for sin (remember the cross)?
5. What are some real-life ways WE can live out the big truth - **The Greatest Gift is God's Presence** - throughout this week of Christmas?