

Why Does God Give Us Problems?

Have you ever thought about how much you could do for the Lord if you did not have so many problems?

Remember, Christmas started through a hardship.

What Does The Bible Say?

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. 2 (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. 4 And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. (Luke 2:1–4 NLT)

God always gets done what He says He will do; however, He doesn't do it the way we think He would do it.

5 He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child. (Luke 2:5 NLT)

Why would Joseph take Mary to Bethlehem?

How Can You Obey?

6 And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. 7 She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them. (Luke 2:6-7 NLT)

God used an inconvenient time for a census to fulfill prophecy.

So think for a moment, what are you complaining about that might be helping your ministry.

Your pain is always a platform to share Christ.

Is there something you have been complaining about that you now need to thank God for allowing to happen to you?

Additional Notes:

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at www.crosswaveschurch.com/host. Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

Explore:

Some skeptics have a problem with how Luke described the timing of this census (sometimes translated tax). The existing historical records indicate that Quirinius undertook a census in AD 6, too late to have been associated with the events leading up to Jesus' birth. Scholars of good will have proposed a plausible

explanation that Quirinius performed a census when he had an earlier tour of duty in Syria in 4 BC. Though no historical records mention a census during this posting, it is possible that one occurred nonetheless, and would have been more familiar to Luke's first readers. At any rate, we are called to humility when addressing "problems" that arise through the lack of historical evidence. The overwhelming tendency in biblical archaeology is to see the Bible confirmed as new discoveries are made. Plus, the Scripture, inspired by God, should be recognized as the most reliable historical document available to us.

Explore:

Christians marvel at how God chose a simple young lady (a virgin at that!) to bring the Christ child to birth. A virgin, you say? How preposterous! Christians are so gullible! They don't even know where babies come from! It's obvious their faith has

replaced their brains.... Critics have a field day with the story of the virgin birth.

Christians, however, do not believe in miracles because they are gullible or perhaps ignorant

of the laws of nature. Christians believe in biblical miracles because they understand that the universe, whose laws we discover and explore, obeys its Creator. They understand that even the laws of nature are subject to the will of nature's law-giver.

So we believe that Mary gave birth to Jesus while she was yet a virgin. Protestants do not, however, believe that the Bible indicates that she remained a virgin the rest of her days. Indeed, it seems to indicate otherwise. Consider that Matthew 1:24-25 specifies that Mary and Joseph had no marital union until after the birth of Christ. Before Jesus' birth, Mary was a virgin. After

Jesus' birth, she experienced normal marital relations with Joseph.

The Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, teaches that Mary remained a virgin forever, and that she herself was conceived without sin. It also teaches that Mary can serve as an intermediary between believers and her son Jesus. As a result, some Protestants shy away from talking very much about Mary at all.

However, what we can learn from Mary is of great value for believers today. Consider how she meekly accepted what God wanted to do through her, even though it was about to change her world drastically. Is this not a great example for believers of all ages?

Even as a young lady she obviously knew the Scriptures (read her song beginning in Luke 1:46), and maintained a pure life with her fiancé. Knowing Scripture,

and living a chaste life—that’s a pretty good example for believers of all ages, but especially for young Christian men and women in a society drowning in biblical ignorance and sensuality.

We also find that Mary pondered in her heart the things that happened to her, Joseph, and to Jesus (Luke 2:19). She practiced what Moses had revealed concerning the circumcision of Jesus and the prescribed offerings.

To be sure, she was not perfect. She and some of her other children went to bring Jesus back home after He began to attract so much attention to His public ministry. Yet it remains clear that she aligned herself with the followers of Christ after the Resurrection (Acts 1:14).

In short, we find in Mary a woman who was indeed incredibly blessed of God. We find also an example of faith, obedience, purity, and identification with others who love God.

Explore:

The journey left Mary increasingly weary as she trod those dusty miles to the south, and when she and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem they were exhausted—especially Mary. Then the pains began. Perhaps at first young Mary was not sure it was her time and did not say anything to Joseph. But when there was no doubt that it was the real thing, she told him—probably with tears. Remember, she was only thirteen or fourteen years old.

We are all familiar with the haunting simplicity of Luke's description of the birth: "While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son" (vv. 6–7a).

In Bethlehem the accommodations for travelers were primitive. The eastern inn was the crudest of arrangements. Typically it was a series of stalls built on the inside of an enclosure and

opening onto a common yard where the animals were kept. All the innkeeper provided was fodder for the animals and a fire to cook on. On that cold day when the expectant parents arrived, nothing at all was available, not even one of those crude stalls. And despite the urgency, no one would make room for them. So it was probably in the common courtyard where the travelers' animals were tethered that Mary gave birth to Jesus, with only Joseph attending her. Joseph probably wept as much as Mary did. Seeing her pain, the stinking barnyard, their poverty, people's indifference, the humiliation, and the sense of utter helplessness, feeling shame at not being able to provide for young Mary on the night of her travail—all that would make a man either curse or cry.

If we imagine that Jesus was born in a freshly swept, county fair stable, we miss the whole point. It was wretched—scandalous! There was sweat and pain and blood and cries as Mary reached up to the heavens for help. The earth was cold and hard. The

smell of birth mixed with the stench of manure and acrid straw made a contemptible bouquet. Trembling carpenter's hands, clumsy with fear, grasped God's Son slippery with blood—the baby's limbs waving helplessly as if falling through space—his face grimacing as he gasped in the cold and his cry pierced the night.

It was clearly a leap down—as if the Son of God rose from his splendor, stood poised at the rim of the universe irradiating light, and dove headlong, speeding through the stars over the Milky Way to earth's galaxy, finally past Arcturus, where he plunged into a huddle of animals. Nothing could be lower.

Luke finishes the picture in verse 7: “She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” Mary counted his fingers, and the couple wiped him clean as best they could by firelight. Mary wrapped each of his

little arms and legs with strips of cloth—mummy-like. No one helped her. She laid him in a feeding trough.

No child born into the world that day seemed to have lower prospects. The Son of God was born into the world not as a prince but as a pauper. We must never forget that this is where Christianity began, and where it always begins—with a sense of need, a graced sense of one's insufficiency. Christ, himself setting the example, comes to the needy. He is born only in those who are "poor in spirit."

The Incarnation provides a marvelous paradigm for Christ's work in our lives. Every Advent season, and hopefully at other times as well, we are brought again to the wonder of the Incarnation. See the swaddled Jesus, lying in the feeding trough in the stable, the birthplace of common livestock. Look long and hard with all your mind and all your heart. From early times the

paradox of the Incarnation has given birth to mind-boggling expressions. St. Augustine said of the infant Jesus:

Unspeakably wise,

He is wisely speechless.

Lancelot Andrewes, who crafted much of the beautiful English of the Old Testament in the King James Version, preaching before King James on Christmas Day 1608, picked up on Augustine's idea and described Christ in the manger as:

the word without a word.

He is in his person the Word of God!

Luci Shaw, in her beautiful poem "Mary's Song," says:

Quiet he lies

whose vigor hurled

a universe. He sleeps

whose eyelids have not closed before.

The one who asked Job, “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand ... when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness” (Job 38:4, 9) now himself lay wrapped in swaddling clothes.

The wonder of the Incarnation! The omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient God became a baby!

R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 83–85.

Explore:

2:1–2. Jesus’ birth was dated by Luke as falling in the reign of Caesar Augustus, who was officially made the ruler of the

Roman Empire in 27 b.c. and ruled to a.d. 14. (See the list of Roman emperors.) Because Herod the Great's reign ended in 4 b.c., Jesus was born before that time. The mention of Quirinius as governor of Syria poses a problem. He was governor in a.d. 6–7, much too late for Jesus' birth. Therefore does the word first (prōtē) refer, as in the NIV, to a first, that is, an earlier, census by Quirinius? If so, one would have to posit a previous governorship for Quirinius at about 4 b.c. Perhaps a better solution is to take "first" to mean "before," as it does, for example, in John 15:18. Luke 2:2 would then read, "this V 2, p 208 was the census that took place before Quirinius was governor of Syria" (i.e., before a.d. 6).

2:3–5. For the census Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem, Joseph's ancestral home. Joseph was a descendant of David (cf. 1:27), who was born in Bethlehem. Some have argued that it seems strange that people were not registered in the places where they currently lived. However, other instances of the same

practice are known (see I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, pp. 101–2). Mary accompanied Joseph for several reasons. The couple knew she would have the Baby during the time Joseph was gone, and they most likely did not want to be separated at that event. Also both of them knew that the Child was the Messiah. They also would have known that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

2:6–7. The Child was born during their time in Bethlehem. The fact that Jesus was called Mary's firstborn implies that later she had other children. The couple was housed in quarters which were not private. According to tradition, they were in a cave near the inn. The Child was placed ... in a manger, from which livestock fed. Being wrapped in strips of cloth was important, for this was the way the shepherds would recognize the infant (v. 12). Some infants were bound up in that way to keep their limbs straight and unharmed.

John A. Martin, "Luke," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 207–208.

Question 1 of 5

Why would the wise men from the East go to Jerusalem first?

Question 2 of 5

Why did Herod have all the boys in the Bethlehem area killed under two years old? (Matthew 2:1-18)

Question 3 of 5

How did God arrange for Joseph and Mary to be in Bethlehem when the child was born? Why was this important?

Question 4 of 5

How do you react when God asks you to do something risky or doesn't seem to make sense?

Question 5 of 5

Why does God use our problems and pain as a platform to share our faith?