

“The Son of God in Swaddling Cloths”

(Luke 2:1-7)

Introduction

➤ As we continue our study of the Gospel of Luke, we come to the second chapter of Luke and the account of Jesus’ birth. It may seem strange to study a traditionally “Christmas passage” in September, but it is actually a great opportunity to examine these verses without the common distractions of the Christmas holiday. In fact, much of our Christmas traditions and celebrations are either not biblical (i.e., not found in Scripture) or even unbiblical (i.e., contrary to Scripture). For some people, the bedlam of Christmas has nothing to do with Christ.

✓ Illust: Actually, bedlam is a great word for describing our commercialized and secularized American Christmas. The word “bedlam” is synonymous with words such as chaos, turmoil, and insanity. Ironically, it is a nickname for the city of Bethlehem – not the one in Palestine but a hospital in London. The Bethlehem Royal Hospital, or St. Mary of Bethlehem, is a psychiatric hospital that was founded in 1247. While originally established as a priory, in 1330 it had become a hospital, and by 1401 it became a hospital for the insane. This insane asylum became known for its noise and chaos and later became a tourist attraction of sorts where people could pay to see the display of madness of its patients. As its popularity grew its name was shortened to Bethlehem and then to Bedlam. Thus, the word “bedlam” is associated mayhem and insanity.

In many ways, this aptly describes what has happened to the Christmas holiday in America. More and more Christmas seems to be less and less about Jesus Christ. Christmas is dominated by gifts and decorations, stories of Santa Claus and magic reindeer, and winter/seasonal activities. Some churches even cancel their services when Christmas falls on a Sunday!

➤ This morning, free from the chaos (or bedlam) of the “Christmas” holiday, we can study the biblical account of the birth of Jesus Christ. It is important to remember that Luke (the human author of this book) – who was not an apostle but a companion (and possible physician; Col.4:14) of the apostle Paul – thoroughly researched the historical evidence of the person and work of Jesus (the) Christ. From the testimony of “eyewitnesses” (Lk.1:2), Luke wrote “*an orderly account*” (Lk.1:3) of Jesus’ life and ministry.

➤ As we turn to the second chapter of Luke’s Gospel, we find the biblical narrative of Jesus’ birth.

Luke 2:1-7 ~ “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴And 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 and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”

➤ These verses underscore two important theological truths that we must know if we are to truly understand the meaning and significance of the birth of Jesus Christ.

A. The execution of God’s plan (vs.1-5a)

➤ The Christmas holiday can be a time of waiting – waiting for the coming of Christmas morning, looking forward to the opening of presents, anticipating the arrival of family (waiting for them to finally leave). The Christmas season is appropriately called *Advent*, which means “coming” or “arrival.” During Advent, we remember that for thousands of years God’s people waiting for the coming of the Messiah. Waiting for the Advent of the Messiah meant waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promise to send His people a Savior – one who would free them from their bondage to sin, save them from the just wrath of God.

The first Christmas was the celebration of the first Advent – Jesus’ First Coming. God’s promised Messiah had come; no more waiting. After hundreds (even thousands) of years of waiting, the Savior had finally come. But not in the way most people were expecting.

Luke 2:1-5 ~ “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴And 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 and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.”

- God’s sovereignty was on display in every aspect of Jesus’ birth. Here we find three specific ways in which God – with divine knowledge and supreme authority – orchestrated the events that led to the birth of Jesus Christ.

1. God’s sovereign timing

- First, we see God’s sovereign timing. This is to say that everything happened according to God’s divine calendar and His divine clock. God is never late. His plans are never misguided or interrupted. Just as Christ’s crucifixion would happen on the exact day of God’s choosing (see Acts 2:23; 4:28), so too did Christ’s birth take place according to God’s sovereign timing. The phrase *“In those days”* (vs.1; lit. “it came to pass in those days”) sets the stage for the time that God had chosen for the birth of His Son.

Gal 4:4-7 ~ But when the fullness of time [*ho plērōma chronos*] had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”

2 Peter 3:8-9 ~ “But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

- Just as the events of Christ’s crucifixion happened on the exact day of God’s choosing, so too did Christ’s birth take place according to God’s sovereign timing. *“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered”* (vs.1). *“Caesar Augustus”* (vs.1; born “Gaius Octavius”) was the great-nephew of Julius Caesar and had fought and clawed his way into power by defeating Antony and Cleopatra. He then, through his brilliant mind and brute force, solidified the greatness of the Roman empire for centuries.

He was the first Caesar to be called “Augustus” (in 27 B.C.) which means “holy,” “revered” or “exalted one” (a title that up until that time was exclusively reserved for the gods). In fact, at about the same time Luke was writing these words, some of the Greek cities in Asia Minor adopted Caesar’s birthday, September 23, as the first day of the New Year, hailing Him as ‘savior.’ An inscription at Halicarnassus (birthplace of the famous Herodotus) even called him ‘savior of the whole world.’

- Now this is where it gets even more interesting. The census that Caesar Augustus called for was not merely a one-time census. His decree established a census to be taken cyclically every fourteen years. In addition, Luke tells us that *“This was the first census that took place when Quirinius was governor of Syria”* (vs.2). While as historians debate exactly what year this was, we can be assured that Luke’s original readers knew exactly when this was. The census was not only used to number each nation by family and tribe, but used for the levying of poll taxes. As it was, it “just so happened” that Caesar Augustus called for a census to be fulfilled during the last weeks (days) of Mary’s pregnancy. This explains why Mary had to accompany Joseph on the long (about ninety mile) journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. This must have been an especially grueling trip for Mary – probably in her early teens – traveling the long and rough terrain while nine months pregnant.

➤ When Caesar called for the census, a seemingly insignificant couple had to make a long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. What's ironic is that Augustus (which, remember, means "exalted one") had issued a decree that would bring the birth of the true Exalted One to a town which God had prophesied. "The baby Mary carried was not a Caesar, a man who would become a god, but a far greater wonder – the true God who had become a man" (R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word: Luke v.1*; p.83). God has always used unrighteous people for His righteous purposes (e.g., Pharaoh; Ex.9:16; Rom.9:17).

✓ Illust: "Little did any idea enter into Caesar's head that he was accomplishing the purpose of God by bringing Mary to Bethlehem at that particular time, so that her child might be born there. But God can accomplish the purposes of His providence, and of His grace, in any way that He pleases, and although Caesar is not aware of all that is involved in his action, his decree, which he intends to simply be a means of registering his subjects, and of filling his [treasury], is to be overruled by God for the fulfillment of the prophecy, uttered centuries before the event happened, that Christ must be born at Bethlehem.

It may seem to some of you, a strange thing that there should be an imperial edict issued from Rome, which should have an important influence upon the place of birth of the child, yet I do not doubt that in God's esteem, the whole of the great Roman Empire was of very small account in comparison with His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and today, the thrones and dominions of the mightiest monarchs are only like the small cogs of the wheels of divine providence where the welfare of even the least of the Lord's people is concerned. He reckons not events according to their apparent importance, the standard of the sanctuary is a very different measure from that which worldlings use. When any purpose of God is to be accomplished all other things will be subordinated to it" (Charles H. Spurgeon, sermon: "A Visit to Bethlehem"; December 24, 1854).

➤ The fingerprints of God's sovereignty are all over Jesus' birth. God was in charge of when Jesus came, where Jesus came, how Jesus came, through whom Jesus came, and even why Jesus came. Nothing was left to chance or mistake. Jesus was born exactly how God intended and desired Him to be born. Why? Because Almighty God had a purpose in Jesus' incarnate birth.

✓ Illust: "There are no accidental occurrences in the realm of the Holy Spirit. Had the Emperor Augustus made his decision three months earlier, or three months later, or one month earlier or one month later, or maybe one week earlier, or one week later, Jesus wouldn't have been born in Bethlehem. But He was. God knew how long it would take to get the registration machinery in place. God knew how long Herod would resist it. God knew how long it would take for that little couple to trek those 85 to 90 miles in the winter. God knew exactly how long it would take so that they would be there for just a few days, but in those days the baby would be born. Every single detail was in the hand of Almighty God. And God still directs history and He still holds every king, every monarch, every ruler in His hand for His own purposes" (John MacArthur; sermon: "Jesus' Birth in Bethlehem, part 1").

➤ The stage was set for Christ to come into the world. The events that God would use to unfold the future and reveal the Messiah had been set in motion. What does this tell us about the birth of Christ? Obviously, it was no accident. What does this say about the sovereignty of God? Without question, God works all things for the good of those who love Him and are His (Rom.8:28). Perhaps needless to say this has staggering implications for us as we live each and every day of our lives.

Isa 46:8-11 ~ "Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, ⁹remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' ¹¹calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it."

➤ The birth of Christ is a reminder to us that God is complete and perfect control of all things; He is never fretting, never faltering, never failing; He is on His throne ruling according to His pleasure and working everything according to His will. Even down to the very detail of exactly when the Savior would be born – and even where He would be born.

2. God's appointed place

➤ In compliance with Caesar's command, we read that *"... all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴And 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 and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child"* (vs.3-5). Interestingly, *"Bethlehem"* (vs.4; *Bēthleem*) was not a large, wealthy or prominent city. It's "claim to fame" was the fact that it was the birthplace of King David – who was a 'nobody' until God anointed him as King of Israel (in Bethlehem; 1Sam.16:4-13). Humanly speaking, Bethlehem was hardly a city worthy of being the place where the Messiah was to be born.

✓ **Illust:** "Bethlehem bears the modern name of Beit-Lahm, i.e., "house of flesh." It is about 5 miles south of Jerusalem, standing at an elevation of about 2,550 feet above the sea, thus 100 feet higher than Jerusalem" (Easton's Bible Dictionary). Today (2017), Bethlehem has a population of about 28,500 people.

➤ Humanly speaking, Bethlehem was hardly a city worthy of being the place where the Messiah was to be born. But that is the point. Bethlehem was the perfect city from where the humble Christ was to be born. In fact, the word Bethlehem means "house of bread." This is without question a symbolic reference to the coming Messiah "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.'"

John 6:51 ~ "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." (see Jn.6:48)

➤ This understanding needs to be coupled with the knowledge that God foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Every sincere and faithful believer would have known that Bethlehem was to be the birthplace of the Christ. In other words, they knew that although Bethlehem was insignificant now, it would be extremely significant later. How did they know? Through God's faithful prophet Micah, about 700 years before Jesus was born, God declared that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem:

Mic 5:2 ~ "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah [ancient OT name for Bethlehem; Gen.35:19], who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days [or "from the days of eternity"]."

Matt 2:5-6 ~ "They [all the chief priests and scribes of the people] told him [Herod], 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ⁶'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'"

➤ This is no doubt a prophetic reference to the birthplace of the Messiah (as the Jewish leaders knew very well; cf. Matt.2:4-6; Jn.7:41-42). This was God's sovereign plan. It is not that God looked down the corridors of the future and discovered what would happen. Rather, God sovereignly established and ordained all future events according to His divine purpose and pleasure; including the very detail of when and where the Christ would be born (see Gal.4:4).

3. God's chosen people

➤ By His sovereign choice, and for His glory, God chose *"Joseph"* (vs.4) and *"Mary"* (vs.5) to be the earthly parents of Jesus Christ. Humanly speaking, Mary and Joseph were nobodies. That is, they were not from a prominent or influential family, they had no high-ranking status in society, and they had no wealth. Simply put, they were young, they were poor and seemingly insignificant. We know that Mary and Joseph were poor since they offered "two turtledoves" for a sacrifice, which was God's gracious provision for those who could not afford a lamb (see Lk.2:22-24; Lev.12:8). We do not know very much about Mary, and even less about Joseph. What we do know about them, however, is of the utmost importance. We know that they were sovereignly chosen by God to bring forth the Messiah. Both Mary and Joseph were faithfully obedient to God – despite His unusual calling on their lives

Luke 1:26-38 ~ “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’ ²⁹But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ... ³⁸And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed from her.”

Matt 1:19-24 ~ “And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ... ²⁴When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife”

- God had given them the responsibility, and the privilege, to be the earthly parents of God’s Messiah. This young couple – with seemingly no advantages, no resources, no protection – trusted God to provide and to fulfill all His promises. They undoubtedly had to endure the criticisms and scorn of those who did not understand, or believe, that Mary was pregnant by means of the Holy Spirit. Undeterred, they faithfully, resolutely, made the long trip to Bethlehem where Mary gave birth to the Messiah. God looked over all the prominent, all the affluent, and all the influential people in the world at that time – as He does even today.

1 Cor 1:26-29 ~ “For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”

- As we discover time and time again through Scripture, God’s ways are not our ways. We need to be constantly reminded of this truth because the world constantly bombards us with deceiving and seducing messages regarding our self-esteem, self-sufficiency and self-interests. We are told that we can do anything, and be anything, we want. We are encouraged to vigilantly tailor our lives to our own preferences, opinions and perspectives – not letting anyone or anything deter us from our dreams and desires. This mindset is contrary to the teaching of Scriptures, and distorts both our view of God and the purpose for our lives. It portrays a god who is to be made in our image (rather than we who are made in the image of God). It seeks to make God subservient to our demands and pleasures (rather than we submissive to His Word and will). But Scripture, loudly, clearly and repeatedly proclaims that God alone is God, the Creator, and that we are His creation.

Isa 55:8-9 ~ “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Isa 46:8-11 ~ “Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, ⁹remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ ¹¹calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.”

Prov 19:21 ~ “Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.”

B. The incarnation of God's Son (vs.5b-7)

- The second important theological truth in this passage is the incarnation of God's Son. After the long and difficult travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, it came time for Jesus to be born: "... *Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.* ⁶*And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.* ⁷*And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn*" (vs.5-7). This simple narrative describes the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The word incarnation means "to become flesh" or "to be made flesh." This doctrine describes the miracle of the Son of God (the second member of the Triune God) taking on human flesh; being born as a human baby. While the word "incarnation" does not appear in Scripture, the truth of it is clearly taught in the New Testament:

John 1:1, 14 ~ "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... ¹⁴And the Word became flesh [*ginomai sarx*] and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (see Col.2:9; Phil.2:5-8; 1Tim.3:16; 1Jn.4:2; Jn.20:28; Heb.1:8).

- The incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, involves both a supernatural conception and a natural childbirth.

1. The supernatural conception

- The birth of Jesus Christ is surrounded by mystery because it is a miracle. A miracle, by definition, is supernatural in that it disrupts, transcends, or refutes scientific or natural laws. All true miracles are supernatural (saying "supernatural miracle" is like saying "miraculous miracle", it is a repetitive redundancy). We cannot always explain, with human reason and knowledge, how God performs a miracle. Not being able to explain how God does a miracle does not disprove the miracle, but describes the miracle; e.g., Jonah).

At this point in Luke's Gospel, Luke merely recorded that "*Mary*" was "*with child*" (vs.5), and that she "*gave birth to her firstborn son*" (vs.7). This all sounds rather normal; hardly supernatural. However, in mentioning that Mary was "*betrothed*" (vs.5), Luke reminds us of what he had already written. Namely that Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus.

Luke 1:30-35 ~ "And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³²He 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, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' ³⁴And Mary said to the angel, 'How will this be, since I am a virgin?' ³⁵And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God.'"

Matt 1:18-25 ~ "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' ²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us). ²⁴When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus." [vs.23 cited from Is.7:14]

Isa 7:14 ~ “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

- The incarnation is the Son of God fully God and fully man; not God reduced to human flesh. The Son of God did not shed His divine glory, like a snake sheds its skin, to become human. Rather, His divine glory was wrapped, veiled, in human flesh. Jesus Christ was, at one time, fully God and fully man (see Col.1:19; 2:9).
- ✓ Illust: “The incarnation was not so much a subtraction as it was an addition; the eternal second person of the Trinity took on Himself a divine nature and joined His divine nature to that human nature for the purpose of redemption” (R.C. Sproul, *The Work of Christ*, p.12).

2. The natural childbirth

- Aside from the miracle of the virgin birth of Christ, everything else about His birth was painstakingly normal. Mary had to go through all the normal aspects of childbirth, without the help of any physical comforts, or medical (or medicinal) aids. As far as we know, it was just Mary and Joseph (by themselves) experiencing the joys and pains of childbirth.
- Luke simply wrote: *“And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn”* (vs.7). Their abject poverty and the lowly setting are actually quite shocking. Where is the angelic chorus? Where are the shouts of joy? Where are the trumpet blasts? Where is the splitting of heaven, and the booming voice of God? Rather, we read of no fanfare. No heavenly chorus. No trumpets, cymbals or drums. Not even a passing mention of a gathering of family and friends. Instead, we find the baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger (i.e., feeding trough).
- At first, the simplicity of this scene may be a bit jolting; even disturbing. In fact, our own nativity scenes are typically much more crowded – we add the magi (or “wise men”) who were most likely not at the place of Jesus’ birth, but brought Him gifts months (if not a couple years) later; we add an angel, or many angels, although the Scriptures never indicate the angels were present at Jesus’ birth; we add animals, although there is no mention of them in the biblical account. However, according to the biblical account, Mary and Joseph may have been alone when Jesus was born (the shepherds would come later; Lk.2:8-20).

But it grows strangely beautiful the more we contemplate it. Joseph and Mary had nothing but love to give Jesus (see Lk.2:24; Lev.5:7). No luxury, no extraordinary or expensive gifts. Only the most basic necessities – including plain, ordinary, lowly “cloths” and a borrowed manger. Jesus got nothing but the ordinary, in fact less than the ordinary. By God’s design, Christ He was born in perhaps the humblest circumstances imaginable.

- In writing this divinely inspired account, Luke simply stated that *“there was no place for them in the inn”* (vs.7). Scripture never mentions an innkeeper or proprietor of this inn. Unfortunately, many have portrayed the innkeeper as the villain of this story for his unsympathetic, even ungodly, refusal to let Mary (9 months pregnant) stay in the inn. But the Scriptures simply states that *“there was no place for [Mary and Joseph] in the inn”* (vs.7).

Some people, undeterred at hearing that they may have been no formal “innkeeper”, persist in blaming the man who answered the door and, after seeing Mary about to give birth, heartlessly refused to let them come into the inn (perhaps even slamming the door in their faces for good measure). Again, in the Bible we simply read, *“there was no place ... in the inn”* (vs.7).

Presumably, the fact that there was no room *“in the inn”* was no one’s fault. The small city (or town) of Bethlehem may have simply been crammed (overcrowded) with people coming to be registered in their hometown (vs.1-3). In fact, the definite article *“the”* (*“the inn”*, vs.7) suggests to some scholars that there was only one main public place for visitors to stay overnight, or at least the one place where Mary and Joseph were intending to stay.

➤ In addition, the word *“inn”* (*kataluma*) may more accurately refer to an upstairs, or guest room, and not a motel per se (translated “guest room” in Mk.14:14 and Lk.22:11; see “inn” [*pandocheion*] and “innkeeper” [*pandocheus*] in the story of the Good Samaritan in Lk.10:34-35). In ancient times, many families would have an extra “guest room” in their house for family or friends. So, the “inn” that Luke referred to could have been a guest room or simple shelter.

I do think we need to villainize an innkeeper, or Joseph’s parents, or hardhearted people. The Bible does not state that Joseph and Mary were thrown out in the street, or that a door was slammed shut in their faces. It simply states a matter of fact: *“there was no place for them in the inn”* (vs.7).

➤ In addition, we have virtually no knowledge about where in Bethlehem Jesus was born. Although it is common to say that Jesus was born in a manger, technically Scripture tells us that Jesus was born, *“wrapped ... in swaddling cloths”* (vs.7; *sparganoō*, or “wrapped in strips of cloth”; also vs.12), and *“laid ... in a manger”* (vs.7), and that the angels told the shepherds that they would find the Savior *“lying in a manger”* which is exactly how they found Jesus (Lk.2:12, 16).

The word *“manger”* (*phatne*; cf. Lk.13:15) indicates that this was a place for feeding and sheltering animals; a feeding trough (made of wood or stone). Contemporary tradition holds that this was some sort of a stable, but earlier traditions suggested that this manger was some sort of a cave. Although we do not know the exact location and setting of this particular manger, we can presume (from a human perspective) that it was not a desirable place to have a baby.

➤ Rather than blame the innkeeper, or the doorman, or the parents, it is more appropriate to see the sovereign hand of God orchestrating all these events. Do you know why *“there was no place for them in the inn”*? Do you know Jesus was *“laid ... in a manger”*? Because that is exactly where God wanted Him to be! God fully intended His Son to be born in abject poverty and profound humility – to obscure and impoverished parents, and in obscure and impoverished circumstances.

Isa 53:2-4 ~ “For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. ³He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.” (see Jn.1:10-11)

Phil 2:5-11 ~ “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

2 Cor 8:9 ~ “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

Conclusion

➤ But we seem to be strangely bent on finding a villain in this story: the evil innkeeper, the calloused doorman, the judgmental parents. The truth is, if we want to find a villain in the Christmas story it is not difficult, and we need not look far. We only need to look at ourselves. For the Son of God willfully left His heavenly throne, to descend to earth, to be born of a virgin, to be born fully man and fully God, to be laid in a manger, to be mocked and rejected, to be blasphemed and tortured, to be crucified and buried, in order to rise from the dead as conquering Savior and Lord. The Son of God was born Jesus the Christ to live the righteous life we could not live, and to die cursed life we deserved to die.

Matt 1:21 ~ [the angel said to Joseph]: “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (cf. Lk.5:32; Jn.1:29)

Gal 4:4-5 ~ “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

1 Tim 1:15 ~ “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.” (cf. 1Jn.3:5)

2 Cor 5:21 ~ “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (Is.53:4-6).

- The fact of the matter is, all the events of Jesus’ humble birth were orchestrated by God’s sovereign design and will. The Christmas story illustrates just how low the Son of God would descend in order to die in our place for our sins. As sinners (Rom.3:10-12, 23; Eph.2:1-2), we are the ones who had no room for Jesus. We are the evil innkeeper; we are the hard-hearted doorman; we are judgmental parents; we the murderous king Herod; we are the self-righteous religious leaders; we are those who mocked and rejected Jesus, those who blasphemed and tortured Him, and those who nailed Him to the cross; we are the haters of God and lovers of worldly pleasures; we are the sinners in desperate need of the Savior from God.
- Thankfully, God sent His Son into the world to save sinners like you and me. This is precisely the reason why Jesus was born. This is the heart of the Christmas story.

Luke 2:10-11 ~ “And the angel said to [the shepherds], ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’”