

CHRISTMAS 1986

Luke 2:1-19

Once upon a time, there lived a king who had power over the whole world. His castle was magnificent. His tables were heavy with the finest of foods. Music and laughter floated from his castle. Clouds wrapped it in magesty. Peasants stopped and looked at the castle, wishing that they knew the king. But the castle was too high and too far away. None of them could reach it.

One cold winter day, the king's tailor came into the royal bedroom with the latest additions to the king's wardrobe. He had chosen the finest materials and had cut and stitched them into the most beautiful clothes that anyone had ever seen.

But the king was not pleased! He threw the tailor out and said he was going to make his own clothes. He shut the bedroom door and locked it. Weeks passed. Everyone at the castle waited and wondered. They tried to imagine the wonderful clothes that the king was making for himself. Finally the day arrived. The door opened and the king appeared.

Everyone - especially the tailor - gasped in surprise. The king was dressed in the simplest, cheapest, most unkingly clothes you could think of! They were almost rags! The king had the choice of the world's finest materials, but he had chosen to wear the clothes of a beggar!

~~Beloved, Christmas will soon be here.~~ Christmas is a time of joy for many. But for many others, Christmas is a sad and lonely time when the feeling that nobody cares becomes overwhelming. But listen to the story of the real king, who put on the rags of a beggar to bring each of us the greatest and most caring gift of all time. From Luke 2:1-19:

1: "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed."

Now, I'm sure that Caesar had no idea what he was doing when he issued that decree. He had no intention of accomplishing God's purpose. He had no plan to bring Mary to Bethlehem so that her child could be born there instead of at Nazareth.

But God can accomplish His purposes any way he wants! Even though Caesar didn't know what he was doing; Even though he only intended to get everybody's name so that he could collect more taxes; Nevertheless: God's plan was accomplished through Caesar's decree.

*was three months ago.*  
But the celebration of God's gift of Jesus Christ should be in our hearts every day.

More than 700 years before this, God had said that the savior would be born in Bethlehem. Micah 5:2 says, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

Does it seem odd to you that an imperial decree from Rome should have such an effect on the birthplace of Jesus? But the entire Roman Empire, with all its power and all its fame, meant almost nothing to God in comparison with His Son. And today, the power and prestige of the greatest nations means almost nothing to God in comparison with us, his children! God doesn't see things the way we do. Many things that seem important to us are worthless to Him.

2: "(And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)"

3: "And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city."

This was a very bitter time for the Jews. Judea had just been incorporated into the Roman province of Syria and the taxation led to a revolt which was cruelly put down by the Roman authorities.

4: "And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)"

5: "To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child."

The name Bethlehem comes from two Hebrew words, Beth meaning house, and lehem meaning bread. Thus "Bethlehem" means "House of Bread". How proper for Jesus to be born in the House of Bread. He is the Bread of Life. He is the Bread that came down from Heaven. Where else should He be born but at Bethlehem?

6: "And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered."

7: "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

When we read that there was no room at the inn, we often think that Joseph and Mary went to a motel and had to stay in the barn because all the rooms were taken. But in those days, there was no such thing as a motel. What the bible calls an "inn" was probably nothing more than a sheltered campground. Because of the tax collection, the area was probably so crowded that Joseph and Mary couldn't even find a campsite. So they had to huddle in with a crowd of animals in a very rude shelter indeed.

What were the swaddling clothes? They were just simple bands of cloth. The baby was laid diagonally on a square piece of cloth like a big diaper. The corners of this cloth were turned up over the baby's feet and sides and the swaddling cloths were wrapped around the baby to keep the square cloth from coming loose. The swaddling cloths did the same job that safety pins do today.

And, what about the manger? It was just a trough or open box in the stable, used to hold feed or fodder for the animals. It's what the animals ate out of.

What a picture! The heavenly glory of the almighty Son of God was clothed in the rags of earthly poverty. How can anyone dare to look down on the poor and needy when the Son of God Himself was born in a stable and cradled in a manger?

How low the King of Glory has stooped on our behalf! How high He has lifted us to share His glory!

8: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night."

9: "And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid."

Even those of us who know Jesus as our Lord and Savior can't stand close to the divine glory without trembling. Even the prophet Isaiah cried out, "Woe is me! for I am undone" when he heard the voice of the Lord calling him (Isaiah 6:5).

Think how wonderfully changed we will be when we are able to stand face-to-face with our Lord and Savior in Heaven. Have you ever thought of that? And these shepherds were "sore afraid" even at the sight of the angel.

You and I, beloved, must go through a wonderful and marvelous change before we will be able to be at home in

God's glory. But that day is coming!

10: "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."

11: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

The Savior was born! As a tiny human baby! The Infinite became finite! The Almighty God decided to become weak! The Son of God, who upholds all things by the word of his power, willingly became helpless! Our Lord, whose voice spoke the entire universe into existence, resigned for a while even the power of speech! And all so that you and I could be saved!

12: "And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

"This shall be a sign unto you," the angel told the shepherds, and this is the banner of Christ even today! There are a lot of people in this world who have given religion a bad name. They are pompous and gaudy, and they parade around with fancy ceremonies and meaningless rituals. But the living Christ still comes to us in the simple, lowly fashion, "wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

13: "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,"

14: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

The angels heard the announcement of the herald and couldn't contain themselves. They rushed down to join in the proclamation of our Lord's birth. And so, "suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God."

15: "And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us."

"Let us now go..." What a simple and devout faith those shepherds had. They didn't say, "Let's go and see if this is true." There was no doubt. They said, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which has come to

pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us." We should all be more like these humble men of faith!

16: "And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger."

17: "And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child."

What did they do after they met the Lord? They went and told others about Him! That's what we should do too! Do you know Jesus? Then ask Him to help you tell others about His love and His gift of salvation!

18: "And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds."

19: "But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."

This is what Mary did with what she heard the shepherds say about her son, Jesus. She laid them all up in her heart, and pondered them, giving careful thought to what they all meant.

Have you thought carefully about what others have told you about Jesus? Have you laid it all up in your heart and pondered it, giving careful thought to what it all means?

Don't waste the gift that Jesus lived and died to bring you! "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Hallelujah! Amen!

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