

The birth of Jesus was predicted by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26-38) and when the day of His birth arrived the angels announced it with great fanfare, albeit to the limited audience of a handful of shepherds. God didn't announce the birth of His Son to the upper crust of society but instead to lowly shepherds who at the bottom of the social ladder of their day.

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. 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.

Luke describes the time frame that these events occur, including who was occupying the political offices of the Roman emperor and the governor of Syria. The Greek word translated "taxed" (and the variation "taxing") has the meaning of being registered/enrolled into public record as to who they were, their income and financial worth. It essentially was a census and its purpose was for planning on how much each resident was to be taxed in the future. In order to properly keep track of everyone, the Roman emperor's decree instructed that everyone under his power should return to their ancestral home city so that their lineage could be properly recorded.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, 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.

Joseph was living in Nazareth, a city in Galilee, but, in order to comply with Caesar's decree, he had to travel to Bethlehem where his ancestor David had been born. According to Roman law, Mary was not required to go to Bethlehem, but since she was "great with child," Joseph may not have wanted to leave her home alone with the birth of their Son so close.

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.

"And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered" – The OT predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (**Micah 5:2** *"But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting"*), so we can see God's providence in the timing of Caesar's decree coinciding with the birth of Jesus so that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem.

"And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes" – Mary did as any mother in her day would have done: she wrapped her newborn son in swaddling clothes, which were strips of cloth wrapped around the child to protect himself from his own sharp fingernails that could injure sensitive facial skin and eyes.

"and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn" – Bethlehem was apparently crowded by the numbers of people who had arrived to comply with Caesar's decree, so Joseph and Mary found a place to stay wherever they could. Instead of a crib they had to use a feeding trough for animals, so either they were staying with animals or else the manger was all that they could find nearby. Scripture does not say that they were in a stable and ancient tradition says that Jesus was born in a cave, possibly one that was used to shelter animals.

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.

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night" – Luke quickly shifts focus to shepherds in the area around Bethlehem who had apparently taken their flocks so far away from home when seeking pasture for them that they had to camp out in the field.

"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" – Picture the scene. It is dark and the only light they may have had was a campfire. Without warning, the area around their camp became illuminated by the brightness of the glory of the Lord. No doubt this light was initially blinding since their eyes had become accustomed to the dark. The suddenness of the light and the appearance of the angel understandably caused great fear in the shepherds since they had no idea what was happening and were overwhelmed by it.

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 Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people" – Knowing the fear that the shepherds were experiencing, the angel reassures them and informs them that he has come with good news. In fact, this news is so good that it should bring "great joy" to all people. The arrival of the Christ, the Redeemer of mankind, is certainly good news. We cannot save ourselves and because of this we are all doomed to go to hell. However, God gave His Son so that we can trust in Him and be redeemed. Too often we don't recognize the significance of the angel's statement and of the birth of Christ.

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" – The angel specifies the reason for the good news. The Messiah (the Christ), Who is the Savior, has been born and the angel tells them that He can be found in Bethlehem. Bethlehem was the birth place of Israel's King David, so it was known as "the city of David."

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

The angel then informs them of how they can recognize the Child Savior: He will be wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Bethlehem was a small town, so there likely weren't many newborn babies there, much less any others born that night. Finding a newborn wrapped in swaddling clothes was not unusual but finding one lying in an animal's feeding trough certainly was. A child born that night, wrapping in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger would be a situation unique enough to identify Jesus to these shepherds.

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

The glory of the angel's presence was impressively bright, but imagine the glory when a multitude of other angels suddenly joined the first one and began praising God. The word "multitude" means "a great number" and the word "host" refers to an army or a band of soldiers. These words imply that there wasn't just a few angels but a vast number of them. No doubt all of the angels in heaven would have wanted to join in the praise if God had allowed them to do so.

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

These angels began praising God and declaring that the birth of the Christ was an expression of His peace and good will toward men. Mankind as a whole has been in rebellion against God but God was the One Who implemented the way that people could be reconciled to Him by sending His Son to be the Savior Who would willingly sacrifice Himself for our sins. God was expressing His desire for peace toward mankind and His good will. **2 Pet. 3:9** *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."*

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

The angel had told the shepherds what town to find the newborn Child and how to recognize Him. No doubt these shepherds wanted to see this Child Whose birth was so important that God sent angels to announce it in such a glorious fashion.

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

"And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger" – We are not told how much work that the shepherds had to do in order to locate Mary and Joseph. Bethlehem wasn't that large of a town despite being crowded due to Caesar's decree. Asking around for a newborn child may have triggered people's memories of seeing a pregnant women in town. God no doubt bypassed any difficulties and guided the circumstances to enable these men to find where Jesus lay in the manger. When they saw the sign described by the angel, they recognized that this was the Child that was being glorified by the angels.

"And when they had seen *it*, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child" – Having seen that everything the angel had said was true, they began telling everyone they encountered over the next days and weeks about this Child and what the angel had said concerning Him.

"And all they that heard *it* wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds" – Everyone who heard the shepherds' account of what they saw and heard were amazed by it. No doubt some believed, some rejected it, and others probably didn't know what to think. Such is the story of Jesus Christ when we tell the lost about Him. Some will believe, some won't and others will not know what to think. However, like the shepherds, we ought to have a desire to tell others about Jesus Christ.