

## The Most Amazing Birth

Luke 2:1-7 (12/23/18)

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Luke 2:7 says, "She gave birth." We can't say enough about the birth of Christ. If we really grasped its significance, it would drive us to our knees in wonder and amazement. It is the great central miracle of Christianity. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Charles Wesley put it like this, "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate deity." Perhaps you've had moments like I've had, "Where is God? What is He like? Why does He hide Himself? I want to see Him." Go to Bethlehem. There is God. He has revealed Himself to us in human flesh. All births are wonderful, but this is the most amazing birth in all human history, the supreme wonder of the ancient and modern world.

This morning we have the opportunity to see how God Almighty by His sovereign hand, His invisible hand of providence, brought it all to pass. Author Everett Harrison in his book *A Short Life of Christ* wrote, "To the devout mind the enrollment under Augustus looms as one of the clearest indications in all history of the providential control of human affairs by an almighty hand." We're going to see that invisible hand of God in this birth in three ways: the time, the place, and the manner of Christ's birth.

### **GOD'S INVISIBLE, SOVEREIGN HAND IN THE TIME OF CHRIST'S BIRTH – vv. 1-2**

*Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.*

Galatians 4:4 says, "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son." This was the fullness of time, the unfolding centuries and years and days to a point in time. The world was ripe for the Messiah. Here's a brief sampling of how God moved the moments of time and prepared the world for this amazing birth.

Through **Prophecies**: There are all the prophecies of the Old Testament, especially Daniel's prophecies, that Messiah would come at the time of the fourth world empire. There was Babylon, Persia, Greece, then Rome, and that's where we are now in this scripture. Daniel 9:26 said He would be cut off at the end of 483 years. Without getting into details, that time has come. The prophetic clock pointed to right now, in these days, in the fullness of the times, Christ was born. Daniel told us when. As we'll see in a moment, Micah 5:2 told us where He would be born.

God's providence prepared the world through the **Koine Greek language**: 300 years before Christ, Alexander the Great pursued his goal of world domination, conquering much of the Middle East all the way to India, spreading not only Greek culture, but especially the Koine Greek language everywhere he went. Most people of the Roman Empire would be able to speak and read koine or the common, street level Greek. The invisible hand of our sovereign God had even prepared the language for the spread of the gospel and the God-breathed New Testament, which was written in Koine Greek.

Through the **Greek Old Testament**: This was the translation of the Old Testament into Greek down in Egypt in the 200s BC, known as the Septuagint. This was the Old Testament the apostles used as they preached Christ to the Greek-speaking Jews and Gentiles.

Through **Religion**: There was a host of mystery and bizarre cults, the Greek and Roman pantheon of gods, and monotheistic but highly legalistic Judaism spread abroad. There were about seven million Jews in the Roman Empire and they built synagogues in many of the cities. That's exactly where Paul went first whenever he came into a town to preach the gospel. The time was ripe. God's invisible hand had prepared the world for the Gospel of forgiveness through this child born to bear the sins of many.

Finally, and most amazingly, God prepared the world for the coming of Christ through the **Roman Empire**: Some forty years before Christ was born, a man named Julius Caesar had adopted his nephew Octavius as his son. Octavius became the emperor of the entire Roman Empire in 27 BC. You'll see

Octavius, now Caesar Augustus, in verse 1. Augustus had crushed all opposition by this time. All civil wars were ended. This period was called the Pax Romana. The Roman army maintained the peace throughout the Mediterranean basin. Rome had cleared the Mediterranean Sea of pirates so commerce flowed safely from country to country. By AD 100 there were thousands of miles of paved or at least improved roads throughout the empire, a postal service had been developed, and travel between areas was smooth. One Roman author said, "We may travel at all hours, and sail from east to west."

And now, at just the right time, not a year or two later or earlier, at just the right time, in the fullness of time, from the very center of the greatest empire on earth, by the most powerful man on earth, Caesar Augustus decreed a census. A Roman census was to gather information for the military and to assess the population for taxation. Like the IRS, Rome wanted to know your name, occupation, property, and family. Caesar Augustus had no idea that his heart was in the invisible hands of the Lord, who was turning it to accomplish prophecies made 700 years earlier by the prophet Micah (Proverbs 21:1). His decree from Rome was the trigger to set in motion a young couple's trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem and the birth of the true Ruler, before whom Caesar Augustus will one day bow and confess that He is Lord to the glory of God.

J. C. Ryle wrote, "A true Christian should never be greatly moved or disquieted by the conduct of the rulers of earth. He should see with the eye of faith a hand overruling all that they do to the praise and glory of God. He should regard every king and potentate...as a creature who, with all his power, can do nothing but what God allows, and nothing which is not carrying out God's will."

#### **GOD'S INVISIBLE HAND IN THE PLACE OF HIS BIRTH – vv. 3-5**

*3 And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. 4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, 5 in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.*

Now if it wasn't for that census decree, it seems, humanly speaking, Mary would have given birth to Jesus in Nazareth. But that would have been impossible, right? When this decree came to Joseph's ears and he knew they had to go down to his place of origin, was he aware? Did he think, "Wow! Mary's about to give birth, and Micah said the Messiah must come out of Bethlehem. Let's go!"? Did he know? A little later when the magi came from the east into Jerusalem asking about the birthplace of the King of the Jews, Herod called in those scribes and religious officials and they answered without a hiccup, "In Bethlehem!" And then they quoted Micah 5:2, "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity" (see Matthew 2:5-6). There was no question in the Jewish mind; the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

So there they go on that long, arduous journey traveling the 100 rugged miles or so from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Bethlehem was higher above sea level than Nazareth, so it says they went "up" to Bethlehem. Are they with a caravan? Maybe. Were there other relatives traveling along? Maybe. Are they married? Yes and no. Matthew 1:24 says Joseph took her as his wife. But Luke says Mary was engaged to him (vs. 5). You put them together and they were technically married, but lived as an engaged couple.

But what are the chances of this happening at just this time, the very time Mary was to give birth? News Flash: there are no chances in God's providence. God ruled Mary's days down to the weeks and days and God rules the moments of your life. I'm always interested to hear how God moves a young man, we'll call him Joe, from this town to this college to that job and that location and at the same time he moves Gretchen from her high school to college and then somehow Joe and Gretchen meet at church or a Bible study or at some friend's house and they end up getting married, having babies, and living their lives together for 65 years! "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord," Proverbs 18:22.

How amazing is God's providence, that hidden hand of God over our lives? Why should we be discouraged, anxious, fearful? "His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me!" It's easy to

panic. We live in crazy days. You may lose your teaching job for refusing to call a girl a boy just because she identifies as a boy. Drag queens and kings are coming to our public library for story hour with vulnerable children. It's insane. Perversion has become the new normal. China is suppressing unregistered churches. False teaching abounds in the churches. Where are we headed? But is it doom and gloom? No! Read Luke 2 and know that God rules the nations. His Invisible Hand of providence has not been withdrawn from our world for one moment.

### **GOD'S INVISIBLE HAND IN THE MANNER OF CHRIST'S BIRTH – vv. 6-7**

*6 While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*

Now we come to the actual birth and I want you to focus on three words: "she gave birth." She gave birth. Every newborn is precious, but none is like this one. She gave birth. Look at Revelation 12:4-5 for an interesting cameo of Christ's birth and future. "And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. 5 And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.

"Silent night, holy night, all is calm...." Yes, but this child is born into enemy territory, into a war zone. Satan hates Him and will do all he can to devour or destroy Him. If he can destroy this child, he defeats Almighty God. In a short time, Herod, a monster of a ruler paranoid of any contestant to his throne, will send his troops down to Bethlehem to slaughter all the boys under two, known as the slaughter of the innocents (Matthew 2:16-18). Christ is born into enemy territory. They'll try to push Him off a cliff and drown Him in the sea. Satan hates this child with a raging hatred. But fear not. The invisible hand of God is with Christ all the way through the cross and resurrection to His ascension, caught up to God and to His throne! She gave birth. What a moment in world history that was. She gave birth.

So where did she give birth? There's no room for them in a comfortable room in the inn, so they've got to go somewhere to prepare for this birth. What do you do when there's no room? You find a safe place. In the summer of 1970 my wife and I rode our Harley Davidson to Martha's Vineyard. We took the ferry over to the island thinking we'd enjoy a nice beach or a quaint bread and breakfast, but soon found out Martha's Vineyard is all private property. Night time came with no place to stay. So we found a pine forest, laid out our sleeping bags on the pine needles, and tried to sleep...until we spotted a salamander creeping close to our faces. We packed it up and headed back to the ferry landing in the middle of the night and tried to sleep on the blacktop parking lot while dogs kept up a steady bark. But Carolyn wasn't with child, so it wasn't so bad. We were young.

When there's no room, you do what you can. That's what Joseph did when he found a private place for Mary to deliver this child. Justin Martyr of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century said it was a cave. Maybe it was. Since there was a feeding trough there, there were probably animals like cows and oxen and donkeys and maybe camels hanging around. No pigs.

There doesn't seem to be anyone there with the couple to assist Mary except for Joseph, and you know how helpful guys can be at moments like this. A female policeman down in Tennessee got a 911 call at 2:30 am to help a woman about to deliver. By the time she got there the baby was half way out. She grabbed and pulled while the mother pushed. Officer Repgrogal posted on FB, "I delivered Isabella on the side of the road yesterday morning at 2:30." We're thankful for police officers who may protect us from bad guys or watch a new life take its first breath.

"She gave birth." Some of you grew up under Roman Catholic theology. Rome teaches that Mary was born without a sin nature – the immaculate conception. She never sinned. Rome also teaches the perpetual virginity of Mary and that since she never sinned she had no labor pains in child birth, because labor pains were part of the curse of sin. Plus, although there is controversy about this, Rome also teaches that since she was a perpetual virgin, she remained a virgin before, during, and after the birth. Catholic scholars still discuss how she could be a virgin during the birth and some claim that somehow,

Jesus miraculously appeared outside Mary's womb without going through her birth canal, like light travels through glass without affecting the glass. We have no reason to believe these things. Mary endured labor pains and delivered Jesus just like every woman giving birth to a child.

Finally, the moment comes when she gave birth, that final push, and God Almighty in human form enters this world. He breathes the oxygen-rich air He Himself created, using those amazing little bitty lungs He Himself designed. The umbilical cord must be cut. Joseph may have had water to wash him off or maybe rubbed the baby down with salt as they did in those days. Mary remembered to bring those strips of cloth to wrap around the baby to keep him warm and feeling secure. She came prepared. Moms are good at that. There's Mary wrapping that little newborn with these cloths. The NLT nicely says, "She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth."

Ladies and gentleman, there isn't anything more miraculous than this; that God Almighty humbled Himself and here he is, a warm, breathing newborn with His heart pumping and blood surging through His veins to feed all the cells in His body. She laid him in a manger or feeding trough of some kind – a phatne (Greek). That little cooing voice would soon teach the multitudes on the hillside about seeking first God's kingdom. Those little clutching fingers would multiply fish and bread for thousands. Those ears would hear the cry of a grieving widow and raise her son from the dead. That little brain, a mind that would grow in wisdom, and yet He knew all things. That's a mystery. Those little feet would walk one day on the Sea of Galilee. Those hands and feet were destined to be pierced through by nails and His head to bleed from a crown of thorns. What a story! Every moment of His life on earth He lived for you and me, if you believe Him to be your Savior from sin. He lived a perfect life so His righteousness could be imputed to the account of every person who receives Him as Lord and Savior. And on that cross He was treated as a sinner, enduring God's wrath in our place, for our sins, for our forgiveness.

Under the invisible hand of God, the long awaited Messiah is now here. This is the grand miracle: God enfleshed in humanity, the God-Man, the incarnate deity. Do you want to see God? Go to Bethlehem. He is Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus Himself said, "If you see Me, you see the Father." If you haven't bowed your heart to Christ and turned from your sins, why don't you do that right now? Make this the first Christmas in which you actually are trusting in Christ and worship Him as your personal Lord and God!