

## **“The Mundane to the Magnificent”**

### **Opening Illustration:**

In the area we are living in Gaithersburg, we will often take these windy, narrow roads to shop or enjoy a drive. These roads are quite populated by very leafy trees, and when we first arrived in August these roads seemed uneventful and quite drab. In fact, we started taking different routes. Something very interesting happened once fall hit. The leaves turned beautiful colours and fell from the trees. What this did was open up a whole new sight line from behind these trees.

This morning we will look at a familiar passage to most, which contains mundane details and very familiar scenes.

But once we remove our familiarity with this passage there are rich truths of the greatness of God

### **Read Scripture:**

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 4 And 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, 5 to be registered with 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.

### **At First Glance We Are tempted To Ask .....**

Why has God chosen to include this passage?

Is it included to remind us of the providence of God?

To show the importance of humility – He used humility in the incarnation

Is it to show Faithfulness despite what our surroundings would tell us?

### **Brief History of Mary, Joseph and the foretold birth**

In the first chapter of Luke we have the angel Gabriel visiting Mary in Nazareth, instructing her of what would lie ahead for her.

Instructs her **“Do not be afraid”**

**Tells about her son:**

**He will be great  
He will be called the most high  
The Lord will give to him the throne of David  
He will reign forever and his kingdom will have no end**

We also have in the first chapter of Matthew, the angel visiting Joseph in a dream and filling him in on the details

**Tells Joseph that the son in his betrothed's womb will save the people from their sins**

**In our passage this morning we will focus on three parts:**

**A census  
A journey  
A birth**

**Not so exciting, quite familiar at first glance**

#### **1. A Census (1 to 3)**

**We are all familiar with the census procedure  
Recent census this past summer**

**I am sure everyone participated in that**

**I think there was a penalty for not participating in it**

During this census an estimated 32.5 million people across the roughly 9.2 million square kilometers of Canadian territory "count themselves in".

But what was the significance of this census?

**First of all who was the decree given by?**

In verse 1 Luke tells that the decree was given by Caesar Augustus

**Who was this Caesar?**

Caesar Augustus was no ordinary man – No small player on the scene

**If Augustus had a hockey card**, the back would read:

- Born in 63 BC as Gaius Octavian

- He was Julius Caesar's grand-nephew, his mother was Julius sister
- He was the first Roman Emperor
- When Caesar was assassinated in 44 BC, his will consisted of the adoption of Gaius as his son. His name was subsequently changed to Gaius Julius Caesar Octavian.

Octavian was recognized by the Roman Senate as the Supreme leader of Rome, only after defeating Mark Antony (Who was at one time married to Augustus sister) and Cleopatra in a civil war. It was at that time he was given the name Augustus which meant **exalted one**.

He is also known in history as the inaugurator of **Pax Romana** (Which meant Roman Peace)  
Some sources referred to him as the "Prince of Peace"

The providential thing about Pax Romana an unprecedented period of peace and stability throughout the Mediterranean which was a major factor in the rapid advancement of the Gospel.

**Caesar Augustus was no small player**, he was one of the most, if not the most powerful man at this point in history

He was a man of great military, social and political skill.

#### **Regarding the census:**

This particular census required a return to their ancestral homes Rome did not normally require a return to the ancestral homeland, but in this case it was required.

Jewish census on the other hand did require a return to the homeland

**\*\* As I researched this passage I thought of what s Census of this sort would involve in today's society**

A census in these times was common in the Roman Empire Used for taxation purposes (**Also used for military purposes**) although this was the first census of its sort  
Luke uses the term "all the world" referring to the entire Roman Empire for this census

We close this examination of the census with the following words from Darrel Bock in his commentary on Luke:

Journeying to one's ancestral homeland is unprecedented, but fits nicely with Jewish custom. The census, which could be controversial, uses customs that would be the least offensive. For Jews, an ancestral registration would be a most natural way to sign up for taxes. So each one travels to his own city to register, and Joseph heads for the Davidic city of Bethlehem.

Even though there would be less offense, the census still served as a reminder to the people of Israel that they were living as a conquered people.

A constant reminder that they were paying taxes to someone who had something that belonged to them

### **What do we make of Luke's mentioning of Caesar Augustus and the decree of a census?**

What Luke does here in recording the events of the decree of a census is portray Caesar Augustus as an unknown agent of God.

Augustus would have had no way of knowing that what seemed like a Governmental act would lead to the fulfillment of one of the greatest moments in History

### **Proverbs 21:1**

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

What we learn from this small portion of Proverbs 21, what we are reminded of is one aspect of God's providential care. Man is entirely dependent on God, which is illustrated by the King's heart under the direction of the Lord.

God directs the King's heart without interfering with the moral freedom of his will.

### **So what we see hear is through the decree for the census we have Credibility**

God through Luke's Gospel links the census and eventual birth within the framework of human history

God, uses Caesar Augustus, the most powerful man anywhere in the world at this moment in history and his census decree to inadvertently move God's plan forward

Caesar is God's agent

**As we proceed to verses 4 and 5 we read of Joseph and Mary's obedience to the decree set forth by Caesar Augustus**

## **2. A Journey (4 and 5)**

**The moving from the census to the journey is often been described as**

"The moving from the universal to the particular"

In verses 4 and 5 we see the narrowing specifically to the family of the child.

Important information regarding the journey:

Approximately 90 miles from Nazareth and 7 miles southwest Jerusalem

This journey would not be an easy one,

The terrain was uneven

Imagine trucking through the landscape with a very pregnant woman on a mule, about to give birth.

This pregnancy was real, just because she was carrying the Son of God did not excuse her from pain and discomfort

**This would be a very difficult journey**

I could see Joseph, at one point even thinking he should have left here behind, more for her sake.

**But this journey was more than a 90 mile inconvenience**

In going up to Bethlehem, Joseph **is not only** obeying the Roman Decree, but fulfilling the words of the angel in Luke 1:31 to 35

In Joel Green's Commentary on Luke he describes what the journey represents:

On one level Joseph's journey is the consequence of the almighty decree of Augustus.

On another level, even the universal rule of Augustus is conceived as subordinate to another purpose, the aim of God.

One may call this ironic, as if Rome is made unwittingly to serve a still greater Sovereign.

## **But it is also prophetic**

### **What is Mr. Green referring to when he references the prophetic?**

The passage we will look at here is found in Micah 5

2 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, 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.  
3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. 4 And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. 5 And he shall be their **peace**.

Here we see the journey becoming the fulfillment of this prophecy found in Micah.

The Lord announces both a birthplace and his Davidic roots

### **Destination: The Birthplace**

**Bethlehem** was not a significant city, it paled in comparison to Jerusalem. In spite of this, God would use this city, the City of David's birth to fulfill the promise. The birth of David's greatest descendent.

"Bethlehem was about to become "Ground Zero" of a Heavenly invasion"

### **Luke is stressing in these two verses the connection of Joseph to the Davidic line**

The journey only becomes necessary because of Joseph's ancestry, His connection to the Davidic Line

**So up to this point we have examined the census given by Caesar Augustus, the Journey to Bethlehem by Mary and Joseph and now we focus on the remaining portion of the text – Luke 2:6 and 7**

**The familiar and the mundane now turn to significant**

**The familiar to the glorious**

### **3. A Birth (6 and 7)**

**A moving from the mundane - This birth was the incarnation of Jesus Christ**

**Define incarnation:**

Wayne Grudem in Systematic Theology defines the incarnation as:

“The act of the Son of God whereby He took to Himself a human nature”

Graeme Goldsworthy in According to Plan states:

“The incarnation of Christ was by special operation of the Holy Spirit bringing about conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary.”

**Yet even in the significance of this birth, we cannot help but be taken with the humble beginning**

The greatness of this self humbling in the case of Christ is measured by how low he was willing to go, how he was willing to stoop from the great heights of his natural and rightful environment And take on human flesh.

To the natural eye we see the words of the angel in Luke 1 and would expect an elaborate birthing and resting place:

He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the highest, Emmanuel God with us”

**Not :**

A livestock stall for a birth place.  
A feeding trough for a resting place.

I have not been to many Palaces by I don't imagine the smell of animal waste and so on to be the aroma.

This is not a fairy tale setting for the future Messianic King

### **Charles Spurgeon asks the question:**

Would it have been fitting that the man who was to die naked on the cross should be robed in purple at his birth?

Would it not have been inappropriate that the Redeemer who was to be buried in a borrowed tomb should be born anywhere but in the humblest shed, and housed anywhere but in the most ignoble manner?

The manger and the cross standing at the two extremities of the Savior's earthly life seem most fit and congruous the one to the other.

He is to wear through life a peasant's garb; he is to associate with fishermen; the lowly are to be his disciples; the cold mountains are often to be his only bed; he is to say, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head;" nothing, therefore, could be more fitting than that in his season of humiliation, when he laid aside all his glory, and took upon himself the form of a servant, and condescended even to the meanest estate, he should be laid in a manger

### **We see here in these verses the great news, the most glorious of truths:**

God humbling himself in the birth of his son  
The promise of redemptive history entering human history has arrived

We have **"A Divine Invasion with eternal consequences"**

Words of "Ligon Duncan"

Through the humiliation spoken of, Jesus purchases us a title to glory and we're to rejoice and to worship and to learn from the mystery of redemption wrought in weakness.

**His humble birth is consistent with the words of Isaiah 53:3**

“He was despised and rejected by men, man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and as one whom men hide their faces. He was despised and we esteemed him not

What we have seen here this morning, in a familiar passage, a passage that at first glance would seem mundane and a simple historical account, is this glorious, assuring truth:

**God specifically works in human history to bring about His saving plans**

**So what is our appropriate response? - Application**

**Sinclair Ferguson:**

“That any good man should be willing to humble himself in this way for the blessing of others is breathtaking; that the offended one, the Lord of Glory should willingly enter into such humiliation should bring awed adoration to our hearts.

**Are our hearts filled with awed adoration?**

**An amazement at God’s providence in History?**

**As we conclude this morning in a time of worship, be aware, thank God for his specific workings – We have been shown he works specific**

**J.C. Ryle addresses this morning’s passage with these words:**

“Let us ever rest our souls on the thought that our times are in God’s hands. He knows the best reason for sending help to His church and new light to the world. Let us beware of giving way to over anxiety about the course of events around us, as if we knew better than the King of Kings when relief should come.”

**“God specifically working in human history to bring about his saving plans.”**

“At **God’s** appropriate time the Son came down”

“For the blessings of others”

That Blessing? – The magnificent gift of the Gospel

