

Holy Textures

Meeting Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
Short, easy to use, faith-provoking insights.

Luke 2:1-20 or Luke 2:(1-7), 8-20 or Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)

"Nonetheless, it is to these unlikely and unworthy characters that the first news of the birth of Jesus is given, and not to the Kings, Caesars, and Governors mentioned at the beginning of this passage."

[Holy Textures](#) is a resource on The Text This Week, www.textweek.com: Contemporary Commentary, Studies, and Exegesis for the Gospel reading.

Year A, B, C, Season of Christmas

Christmas Eve / Day

December 24 / 25

Read the passage at the bottom of this post: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

Click [here](#) for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this note.

Listen to or download an MP3 of this post:

[Luke 2:1-20](#)

Sermon by the [The Rev. Dr. George Hermanson](#), "[Christmas Eve - A Night Of Hosting](#)."

Luke's historical details for the birth of Jesus are problematic.

Luke 1:5, "In the days of King Herod," who died in 4 BC.

Luke 2:1, "In those days a decree went out from Emperor (or Caesar) Augustus that all the world should be registered," places the birth anytime between 27 BC to 14 AD, the length of the very long reign of Augustus.

Luke 2:2, "This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria," places the date at 6 or 7 AD.

Most scholars agree that Luke and Matthew's reference to "In the days of King Herod," is the most reliable reference and that Jesus was born sometime before Herod's death in 4 BC.

Note that Matthew 1:18-25 and 2:1-12, make no mention of Nazareth or a census.

Note that in Luke there is no mention of how Joseph and Mary traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The distance between these two villages is approximately 70 miles or 130 kilometers; a journey of at least 3 or 4 days by foot. It is likely that neither place was a "city" or even a "town," as each would have about 100 adult residents.

Holy Textures

Meeting Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
Short, easy to use, faith-provoking insights.

Luke 2:7, "and wrapped him in bands of cloth (swaddling clothes)" was an ancient custom practiced up to modern times of tightly wrapping a new born so that their arms and legs were bound and the torso held rigidly.

Luke 2:7 "and laid him in a manger." A manger is a feeding trough not a barn or stable. Peasants who had domestic animals kept them in one half of their one-room houses, with the manger in the middle to provide a divider. (The animals provided much needed heat in the cold of winter.)

Luke 2:7 "because there was no room in the inn." The word that is translated here as "inn," appears only 2 other times in the Bible and refers to the guest room where Jesus and his disciples last ate together. (See Mark 14:14 and Luke 22:11.) Likely there would not be an "inn" as we think of it today in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus. It is more likely that Mary and Joseph were staying in the peasant house of distant relatives who took them in as hospitality required them to do.

Luke 2:8-20. Bruce Malina comments about shepherds:

While shepherds could be romanticized (as was King David), they were usually ranked with ass drivers, tanners, sailors, butchers, camel drivers, and other despised occupations. Being away from home at night they were unable to protect their women, hence considered dishonorable. In addition, they often were considered thieves because they grazed their flocks on other people's property.

Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, Page 232.

Nonetheless, it is to these unlikely and unworthy characters that the first news of the birth of Jesus is given, and not to the Kings, Caesars, and Governors mentioned at the beginning of this passage. But then again, perhaps it is precisely the despised and the disreputable who are most in need of - and receptive to - the Good News of peace on earth and God's good will to all.

The Good News is not simply a "feel good" news. It is quite literally, a royal proclamation declaring the birth of a new King - a Prince of Peace - and of the coming of his realm here on earth as it already is in Heaven. Is this news that needs to be heard today? May it be so.

David Ewart,

www.davidewart.ca

Note: Historical background information is primarily from Bruce Malina, et. al. (see link below), pages 231-233.

* [Link to Amazon.com Bibliography for Bruce Malina, et. al.](#), Social Science Commentary on ... The Synoptic Gospels; The Gospel of John; The Book of Acts; The Letters of Paul; The Book of Revelation; and others.

Holy Textures

Meeting Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
Short, easy to use, faith-provoking insights.

Luke 2:1-20 or Luke 2:(1-7), 8-20 or Luke 2:1-4, (15-20) (NRSV)

¹ In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and 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 heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. [Used by permission](#). All rights reserved.

[Return to top of post.](#)

Luke 2:1-20 or Luke 2:(1-7), 8-20 or LUke 2:1-14, (15-20) (The Message)

¹ About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. ² This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. ⁴ So Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David's town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. ⁵ He went with Mary, his fiancé, who was pregnant. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel.

Holy Textures

Meeting Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
Short, easy to use, faith-provoking insights.

⁸ There were shepherders camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. ⁹ Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. ¹⁰ The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: ¹¹ A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. ¹² This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."

¹³ At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises:

¹⁴ Glory to God in the heavenly heights,
Peace to all men and women on earth who please him.

¹⁵ As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherders talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us." ¹⁶ They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. ¹⁷ Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. ¹⁸ All who heard the shepherders were impressed.

¹⁹ Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. ²⁰ The shepherders returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told!

Scripture quotations from THE MESSAGE. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. [Used by permission](#) of NavPress Publishing Group.

[Return to top of post.](#)