

December 24, 2022 – Christmas Eve

***“O Little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie...”***

[Luke 2:1-14](#)

*<sup>3</sup> All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup> 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.*

At the time of the birth of Jesus, Bethlehem and all of Palestine was occupied by the Roman Empire. The gospel writer, Luke, describes the circumstance surrounding the birth of Jesus as stark and sparse. There was a great gap between the rich and the poor, and hunger was prevalent. The birth dates to the reign of Augustus Caesar, the Roman Emperor, who was known for his ruthlessness and cruelty and to when Quirinis was governor of Palestine. It is into this world of occupation, poverty, hunger, and suffering that Jesus was born.

Caesar issued a decree that a census of the known world should be taken, so Mary and Joseph make the arduous 90-mile journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. This journey would have taken at least 3-4 days. The trip was made while Mary was in the last stages of pregnancy, riding on the back of a donkey with Joseph leading the way.

Can you imagine how hard that was for her to endure? When they arrived in Bethlehem, there was no room in the inn. So, Jesus was born in a place where animals were fed. After Jesus was born, Mary wrapped him in swaths of cloth, which is the normal process, and laid him in the feeding trough.

Now out in the fields were shepherds quietly tending to their sheep, when suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared to them and proclaimed that a child had been born in the city of David saying, “This will be a sign for you: you will find the child wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Yet this is no ordinary child; this baby born in such humble circumstances is the Savior of the world, the Messiah! The shepherds go with haste to check it out and find it just as the angel had said. They are now filled with joy, and they began to praise God.

*“The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.”*

As we once again read this story, we are filled with awe and wonder--and sometimes a little nostalgia. We need to be reminded that this story is real. It happened, and it had powerful significance--then and now. We need to celebrate the true power of this story—that Christ was born and fulfilled the promise that God really *“is with us--Emmanuel.”*

We are not alone in our sin and strife. The great good news is that God sent his son to live among us and save us from our sins. We have a savior who loves us; he lived, taught, healed, died, was resurrected, and he is coming again! The savior who takes away the sins of the world: this is the God we have come to know and worship. Thanks be to God!

***Prayer:*** *“Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us tonight”. Amen.*

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