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### Weekly Bible Study Schedule

**Tuesday, April 28, 7:00 AM in HHR #5**

(breakfast provided)

**Tuesday, April 28, 8:30 PM in Office #225**

(Sen. Wayne Wallingford's office)

## INTRODUCTION

One of my best friend's family traditions is to celebrate **Christmas in July**. At first it was odd to me, then curiosity drew me in only to recognize it's benefit. His extended family isn't able to gather for Christmas in December, so they use July to journey to a family member's home. They rotate the hosting of their annual gathering. The multipurpose gathering serves as a family reunion of sorts, a place for gift giving, and a time to worship the birth of the Lord.

We are wrapping up the 98<sup>th</sup> General Assembly Session. It's the end of April, yet, today, we study **Luke 2, the story of Christ's birth**. Consider Luke chapter 2 our Christmas in July.

Jesus' birth changed the course of history. At His birth time changed from BC to AD, that is before Christ to Anno Domini (The year of the Lord), and the world would never be the same again. This is how we date human history. It was the greatest event in history.

In Luke's narrative we see much traveling: from Nazareth to Bethlehem, by Mary and Joseph, and from the Shepherds in the field to the town of Bethlehem. Even the angels left heaven to come to earth. The creator of the universe left His throne to swaddle in a barn. Thus, Christmas was born, simple and yet, profound.

Luke's narrative gives opportunity to **refocus our spiritual scope**, and to **restore our simplicity of faith**.

**2:1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.**

- **In the days of Herod**, a brutal oppressive ruler. He was a tyrant dictator in the area of Palestine.
- **In the days of Zechariah**, an angel appeared and told him that his wife Elizabeth would have a

child in her old age. For 500 years no one had seen an angel and suddenly, this old priest is visited by the Angel Gabriel. He tells Zechariah the Lord has heard their prayer.

- **In the days of Mary**, the Angel Gabriel came to a young virgin, named Mary, telling her she would supernaturally conceive and give birth to the Christ, the Messiah, Savior of the world.
- **In the days of the Roman Empire**, when the Roman army occupied the land of Israel and they taxed the people.

**Caesar Augustus** was a magnanimous person, born in 63 BC. His name was Gaius Octavius, known as Octavian. He was a grandnephew to Julius Caesar. Since Julius Caesar did not have a son, he took a liking to Octavius as he was growing up around Julius. Eventually, adopted as Julius' own son, he declared Octavius the heir to the throne. Octavius was a man of great military, political and social skill. Eventually, the Roman Senate named him the consul of Rome. That was the top political job in the republic. Perhaps, his greatest contribution was the Pax Romana, the Roman Peace.

He created a network of roads and relationships that expanded from Spain all the way into the Middle East. The "international" communication and commerce paved the way for the Gospel that would spread a few decades later because of the virtual borders.

After 4 years of becoming consul the Roman Senate gave him the title Augustus, which meant holy one. It was a term used to refer to the gods. And after the Senate gave him the title Augustus he became known as Caesar Augustus. Later, another title was given to him, it's been found in a Mediterranean town called Halicarnassus, the home of historian Herodotus, and the inscription says: "*Caesar Augustus, the savior of the world.*"

Luke begins his gospel by telling us that at the very time there was a false savior ruling the world, the **TRUE SAVIOR** was born in obscurity.

**There are basically two reasons for the census.** First, was military enlistment. Caesar Augustus would know how many conscripts he could get for his army. The Jewish nation (Jewish males) was exempt because of their unwillingness to accept the idolatry of the Roman Empire. Second, was to provide a tax basis for all that Rome was doing for the nations they had conquered. He taxed the people to provide services for people across the Empire.

**2:2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria.**

Caesar Augustus did not only take one census, he took a series of census' that would be conducted at 14-year intervals and this was the first one. So in Luke's day people would know, according to historical records, that there was a census in 6 AD.

**2:3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town.**

Interestingly, the Roman government didn't require that they go to one's own town. Perhaps the Jewish leadership asked them to return to their ancestry for the sake of persevering family genealogy. Most likely there was some kind of deadline attached to this census, otherwise Joseph and Mary would have delayed their departure.

**2:4 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...**

Bethlehem wasn't necessarily a notable city, except the fact that King David was from there and Joseph was from the line of David. Also, the prophet Micah had prophesied in chapter 5, verse 2 that the eternal King of Israel would come from Bethlehem.

*"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 coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."*

So Bethlehem is significant because the Messiah would come from there.

**2:5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.**

Here we have Joseph, probably 15 or 16 years of age, and Mary, most likely 12 or 13 years old, beginning a 90-mile trek. Mind you, she is 9-months pregnant.

In Matthew 1:18-25 we have the account of Jesus' birth from Joseph's vantage point.

*"Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: **he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.***

Matthew tells us they had the celebration of marriage. Luke tells us they were acting as though they were only engaged. In other words, she was a virgin until the birth of Jesus, but she was his wife.

**2:6-7a And while they were there the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son...**

They lived in Bethlehem for two years. Luke is careful for his wording: **“to her firstborn son.”** Mary had many sons.

*“and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?”*

*And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” Matthew 13:54-56*

The significance of Jesus as the firstborn is from his father because he would have received the family inheritance. Now Joseph didn’t have much, but if there was a king in Israel at that time, Joseph was the one with the right to the throne. So Jesus inherited the right to become king of the Jews from his “adopted” father Joseph.

**2:7b ...and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.**

Placed in an animal feeding trough, because there was no room for them in the inn. Bethlehem would have been packed with outsiders, people conducting the census for Rome. It’s a small town, any guest rooms would have been taken.

They needed a private space, something enclosed. By default, they took up space with the animals. It wasn’t ideal, but it was private. In simplicity and obscurity the King of the Universe was born.

## REFLECTION

### God holds time in His hand

When the world was acknowledging Caesar Augustus, savior of the world, God was bringing the true savior into the world.

The Apostle Paul said it this way: *“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” Galatians 4:4-7*

Mary and Joseph, most likely didn’t understand why things were going the way they were. The 90-mile trek, the unexpected place to stay, and to give birth to the Messiah, with all its smells and sounds.

I wonder if at any point they said: “God, we don’t understand”. Maybe this morning you’re in the midst of a 90-mile trek. Do you have a lot of questions? Could we agree, it’s possible that God is working a plan much bigger than your own life? In His sovereignty, He can work out your life along with His plan and bring them in perfect harmony to accomplish His will.

*“The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives.” Psalm 37:23*