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A Serendipitous Event? No! (Luke 2:1-14)

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In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 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, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 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. And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" Luke 2:1-14

In those days: what days? The days of chapter one, naturally; and the days of Caesar Augustus, the nephew of Julius Caesar. At this time, Augustus is approximately 60 years old. He is the Emperor of the largest then known empire and when he issues a decree, it is obeyed.

Register the world? The word for world is the Greek *Oikoumene* meaning inhabited world, the world of the Empire. If you prefer the old KJV Bible, you will note it states the purpose of the decree was taxation. The Greek text doesn't say that, though undoubtedly this was Augustus' purpose. But Luke wants us to see God's sovereign purpose behind Augustus' decree.

But, for a moment, let's engage in a little biblical license. If Augustus' purpose was taxation, then Jesus was born with a price on his head. Now, if you will hearken back to the Exodus narrative and the birth of Moses in Exodus 1:15, 16; was not Moses also born with a price on his head? (Later, read the book **To The Hebrews** and take note of the parallels in Jesus' Life and Moses, keeping in mind the concept of "shadow" and "reality".

Application: every human being born into human history enters with a price on his or her head: Romans 3:23 "...for the wages of

sin is death..."; Romans 5:12-14 "...Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come...". Yet, the promise is this price has been paid for those who will respond: Romans 5:8 "...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us..." I Corinthians 15:22 "...For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive...", John 1:12 "...But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...".

Does the price still hang over your head or do you rest easy knowing the price has been paid?

God's purpose? Get two unknown and humanly insignificant people to a specific, pre-determined location for a birth. God moves heaven and earth to bring to pass His sovereign will and in this case, he moved upon Augustus to order a census. Augustus had his motive(s), but behind whatever those motives might have been was God's decree that this birth to take place where He had pre-determined it to take place¹. Given all of human history is the unfolding of His sovereign plan, this snapshot affords us an insight: **God is ultimately behind all of history as it unfolds.** Sometimes what we see is illustrative of the depth and extent of human evil and other times the impact of God's common grace. But, irrespective of our human perspective, we need to view history from His eyes, as described for us in the Bible²

God's timing: In God's sovereign plan, Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem (the house of bread-John 6:35). Therefore, Augustus' decree had to have surfaced in his mind so as to allow time for the information to travel to the land of Israel and for the travel of Joseph and Mary. In God's plan there are no fortuitive or serendipitous events. They may seem as such to you and me, but we, on our part need to adjust our thinking, bringing it into harmony with His control. God never utters an "Oops!"

Application: Have you recently experienced a distressing turn of events which, to you, seemed to be an accident, or an experience which as you would see it, ought not to happen to a believer, or to anyone? Have your best laid events turned to worms even though you were convinced they were compatible with what has been revealed in His Word? It is at moments such as that we need to

BIBLE STUDY

TUESDAY @ 8:00 A.M., ROOM 100 RYAN BUILDING

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recall Lamentations 3:22, 23 as well as verses 37, 38 and all in the context of God's Sovereignty and Purpose.

Long ago, I memorized the following so as to assist me whenever I encountered one of these types of events:

My life is but a weaving, between my God and me,

I do not choose the colors and he weaveth steadily.

Oft times He weaveth sorrow and I in foolish pride

Forget He sees the Upper and, I, the underside.

Not til the looms are silent and the shuttles cease to fly,

Will God unfold the canvas and explain the reason Why.

The dark threads are as needful in the skilfull weaver's hands

As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern he has planned.³

Response to Government: Joseph and Mary pack up and journey even though she is in the later stages of her pregnancy. We have absolutely no idea as to their mind-set relative to government, philosophically. They were subjects of Rome's *fast*, euphemistically referred to by historians through the centuries as Pax Romana. (Oh, the power of euphemism! ☺). Not only does Mary the peasant carry within her placenta the Savior of the world, she also carries the One who will bring to light the germs of a new way of looking upon government(s)⁴.

The Birth: in terms of the actual birth, nothing unusual occurs. (The virginal conception was the miracle). Jesus comes into the world in the same manner as you and I came into the world. We caused our mother physical pain and stress though once it was over, I suspect our moms had a moment or two of unequalled Joy. Later, she probably began to wonder (at least I suspect my mom did!) In the case of Mary and Joseph, the actual location of the birth was one outside of the sight of the public. Again, the irony: God entering human history in a quiet manner, not drawing attention to himself as would be the case with the "gods" of every other religion. What contrast: enter quietly, unnoticed, and exiting with a local earth shattering notice, not only in Jerusalem but throughout the empire. The stone cut out without hands⁵ is now in the hands of the One who will ultimately "throw", it thereby demolishing Daniel's 4th Empire, Rome. Contrary to expectations, the end of this empire is not immediate in humans terms, yet an "end" has transpired in terms of the divine purpose and calendar.

Angels and Shepherds (note: heaven and earth represented): The bearers of the news of this wondrous event do not address the official religious leadership nor to anyone known as religiously sensitive such as Simeon⁶ or Anna⁷, but to shepherds. Shepherds? (Remember, their king, by whom every other king was measured started out as a shepherd⁸). The odds are, these are shepherds of the temple flock designated for sacrifice. Talk about poetic! The birth of the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world is announced to shepherds. Does God delight in irony?

There are some who suggest these are shepherds tending the Temple flocks, an allusion the birth of the Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world. Maybe so? By now, after close onto 400+ years since the return from Babylon, Israel has sunk to unbelievable depths of depravity, spiritually and morally. Just as God had informed Moses prior to Moses' death (Deuteronomy 31, 32), the hour glass of impending judgment is drawing near.

The Reality Stated by the angels: "Glory to God in the highest"...this is always the case throughout the unfolding of history, regardless of human assessment. There is no one in the highest heaven wringing their hands saying, woe is me, what can we do next?" "and on earth peace among those with whom he is well pleased". With whom is He well pleased, for they are the recipients of this peace? Psalm 119:165 affords us an insight: "Great peace have they which love thy law; nothing shall offend them": Isaiah 32:17 another "and the work of righteousness peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever", and Proverbs 3:1 "...My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you..."

Application: what is the status of peace within your soul? Are you at peace with Him? With others? With yourself? Remember: the peace that surpasses understanding⁹ is found only in Jesus, the Christ whom to know, is life eternal¹⁰.

¹ Micah 5:2

² Isaiah 8:20 & 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

³ Benjamin Malachi Franklin (1882-1965) U.S. Library Of Congress, Washington DC, Card # 20060727210211

⁴ Jeremiah 31:31-34

⁵ Daniel 2:34, 45

⁶ Luke 2:29

⁷ Luke 3:36

⁸ 2 Kings 14:3; 16:2; 2 Chronicles 28:1

⁹ Phil. 4:7

¹⁰ John 17:3