

## Luke Chapter 2

**Luke 2:1 "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed."**

This is beginning to tell of the birth of Jesus. The time is when this tax was begun (in the time of Caesar Augustus).

“Caesar Augustus”: Caius Octavius. Grandnephew, adopted son, and primary heir to Julius Caesar. Before and after Julius’ death in 44 B.C., the Roman government was constantly torn by power struggles. Octavius ascended to undisputed supremacy (in 31 B.C.), by defeating his last remaining rival, Antony, in a military battle at Actium.

(In 29 B.C.), the Roman senate declared Octavius Rome’s first emperor. Two years later they honored him with the title “Augustus” (Exalted one”, a term signifying religious veneration). Rome’s republican government was effectively abolished, and Augustus was given supreme military power. He reigned until his death at age 76 (A.D. 14).

Under his rule, the Roman Empire dominated the Mediterranean region, ushering in a period of great prosperity and relative peace (the Pax Romana). He ordered “all the inhabited earth” (i.e., the world of the Roman Empire), to be counted. This was not merely a one-time census; the decree established a cycle of enrollments that were to occur every 14 years.

Palestine had previously been excluded from the Roman census because Jews were exempt from serving in the Roman army, and the census was designed primarily to register young men for military service (as well as account for all Roman citizens). This new, universal census was ostensibly to number each nation by family and tribe (hence Joseph, a Judean, had to return to his ancestral home to register).

Property and income values were not recorded in this registration. But soon the names and population statistics gathered in this census were used for the levying of poll taxes, and the Jews came to regard the census itself as a distasteful symbol of Roman oppression.

**Luke 2:2 "([And] this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)"**

“Cyrenius was governor of Syria”: Fixing a precise date for this census is problematic. Publius Sulpicius Quirinius is known to have governed Syria during A.D. 6-9. A well known census was taken in Palestine in A.D. 6. Josephus records that it sparked a violent Jewish revolt (mentioned by Luke, quoting Gamaliel in Acts 5:37).

Quirinius was responsible for administering that census, and he also played a major role in quelling the subsequent rebellion. However, that cannot be the census Luke has in mind here, because it occurred about a decade after the death of Herod, much too late to fit Luke’s chronology (1:5).

In light of Luke's meticulous care as a historian it would be unreasonable to charge him with such an obvious anachronism. Indeed, archeology has vindicated Luke. A fragment of stone discovered at Tivoli (near Rome), in A.D. 1794 contains an inscription in honor of a Roman official who, it states, was twice governor of Syria and Phoenicia during the reign of Augustus.

The name of the official is not on the fragment, but among his accomplishments are listed details that, as far as is known, can fit no one other than Quirinius. Thus, he must have served as governor in Syria twice. He was probably military governor at the same time that history records Varus was civil governor there.

With regard to the dating of the census, some ancient records found in Egypt mention a world-wide census ordered in 8 B.C. That date is not without problems, either. It is generally thought by scholars that 6 B.C. is the earliest possible date for Christ's birth.

Evidently, the census was ordered by Caesar Augustus in 8 B.C. but was not actually carried out in Palestine until 2-4 years later, perhaps because of political difficulties between Rome and Herod. Therefore, the precise year of Christ's birth cannot be known with certainty, but it was probably no earlier than 6 B.C. and certainly no later than 4 B.C.

Luke's readers, familiar with the political history of that era, would no doubt have been able to discern a very precise date from the information he gave.

**Luke 2:3 "And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city."**

"His own city": I.e., the place of tribal origin.

**Luke 2:4 "And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)"**

"Nazareth ... Bethlehem": Both Joseph and Mary were descendants of David and therefore went to their tribal home in Judea to be registered.

This was a difficult trek of more than 70 miles through mountainous terrain, a particularly grueling journey for Mary, on the verge of delivery. Perhaps she and Joseph were conscious that a birth in Bethlehem would fulfill the prophecy (in Micah 5:2).

It appears that each family returned to their place of birth where they were registered and were taxed from where they were born and not from where they lived now. We Christians know that the main reason they had to go to Bethlehem was to fulfill prophecy. It had been prophesied that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem.

Micah 5:2 "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, [though] thou be little among the thousands of Judah, [yet] out of thee shall he come forth unto me [that is] to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth [have been] from of old, from everlasting."

God's prophecy must be fulfilled in every detail.

"Bethlehem" means house of bread. Jesus is the Bread of Life.

**Luke 2:5 "To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child."**

“Espoused”: Matthew 1:24 indicates that when the angel told Joseph about Mary’s pregnancy, he “took her as his wife”, i.e., he took her into his home. But they did not consummate their marriage until after the birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:25). Therefore, technically they were still betrothed.

Mary was living with Joseph, but had never slept with him. She is pregnant by the Holy Ghost of God. It is time for her to be delivered.

**Luke 2:6 "And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered."**

It is generally understood that this was in the winter. Not everyone believes December 25th to be the exact day, but I believe it was the exact day because the Jewish Feast of Lights falls on this day; and Jesus is the Light of the world. This is the Feast of Dedication or Feast of Lights. This feast begins on December 25th and goes eight days.

**Luke 2:7 "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."**

“Swaddling clothes”: Strips of cloth were used to bind a baby tightly. It kept the baby from injuring sensitive facial skin and eyes with its own (often sharp) fingernails, and was believed to strengthen the limbs. This is still the custom in some Easter cultures. The absence of such cloths was a sign of poverty or lack of parental care (Ezek. 16:4).

“Manger”: A feeding trough for animals. This is the source of the notion that Christ was born in a stable something nowhere stated in Scripture. Ancient tradition held that He was born in a cave (possible one used as a shelter for animals). But no actual description of the location is given.

“No room for them in the inn”: Possible because many were returning to this ancient town to register in the census.

Mary possibly had more children besides Jesus later, because the marriage of Mary and Joseph was complete. We do know that Mary and Jesus' brothers came to see Him and are spoken of as Jesus' brothers.

Matthew 12:47 "Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee."

These would have been Jesus' half-brothers. They would have been Mary's children by Joseph. We do know that Mary lived with Joseph twelve years as husband and wife. We see in verse 49 of this chapter that Mary was still married.

As to the inn being full, there were so many people in town to pay their taxes that all of the rooms were full.

**Luke 2:8 "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night."**

“Shepherds”: Bethlehem was nearby Jerusalem, and many of the sheep used in the temple sacrifices came from there. The surrounding hills were prime grazing land, and shepherds worked in the area day and night, all year round. Therefore, it is not possible to draw any conclusion about the time of year by the fact that shepherds were living out in the fields.

The "same country" just means in the area around Bethlehem. This is an area that would be perfect for grazing sheep. These shepherds had to watch for wild animals attacking the sheep at night. Jesus is the Great Shepherd and Christians are spoken of as sheep. So what would be more appropriate to tell first than the humble shepherd?

**Luke 2:9 "And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid."**

Many, many times the presence of the Lord is shown by a very bright Light. The Shekinah glory of God is a presence of very bright Light. Moses was in the presence of this Light on Mt. Sinai. This same bright Light led the children of Israel, and this was the same bright Light seen on the Mount of Transfiguration.

We see that they feared the Lord. Man fears his shortcomings being known of God.

**Luke 2:10 "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."**

God's message to mankind, then and now, is "fear not". This good news is for everyone ("all people"). The gospel of Jesus Christ is good news of great joy. The message is: there is hope.

**Luke 2:11 "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."**

“City of David”: I.e., Bethlehem, the town where David was born, not the City of David, which was on the southern slope of Mt. Zion.

“A Savior”: This is one of only two places in the gospels where Christ is referred to as “Savior”, the other being (John 4:42), where the men of Sychar confessed Him as “Savior of the world”

“Christ”: “Christ” is the Greek equivalent of “Messiah”

“Lord”: The Greek word can mean “master”, but it is also the word used to translate the covenant name of God. Here (and in most of its New Testament occurrences), it is used in the latter sense, as a title of deity.

This Christ child is the Savior of the whole world. This is Messiah, the Anointed One, who has come to save whosoever will. Jesus Christ was born of a woman for the people.

**Luke 2:12 "And this [shall be] a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."**

This tells the shepherds that Jesus will be in the cave where the stock is held because of the manger. The manger was used to feed fodder in.

**Luke 2:13 "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,"**

“Host”: A term used to describe an army encampment. Christ also used military imagery to describe the angels (in Matt. 26:53).

(Revelation 5:11), suggests that the number of the angelic host may be too large for the human mind to fathom. Note that here the heavenly army brought a message of peace.

This "heavenly host" is a band of angels. One of the jobs of the angels is to continually praise God. Jesus is the King of peace. Peace has come to the earth in the form of a babe in a manger. This "good will" is from God to man. God has made a way for lowly man to be saved.

**Luke 2:14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."**

“The highest”: I.e., heaven.

“Peace”: This is not to be taken as a universal declaration of peace toward all humanity. Rather, peace with God is a corollary of justification.

“Good will toward men”: God’s peace is a gracious gift to those who are the objects of His pleasure.

**Luke 2:15 "And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us."**

The shepherds immediately want to go into Bethlehem to see this wonderful thing that the angel has told them. The angels have now done what they were sent to do and have gone back to heaven. Angels are ministering spirits. They realize this message that they have received is from the Lord.

**Luke 2:16 "And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger."**

They had no difficulty finding them because of the manger mentioned. They lost no time getting to the cave. The fact that Joseph is there makes earthly men associate Joseph as Jesus' Father, but Jesus' Father was God.

**Luke 2:17 "And when they had seen [it], they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child."**

They gave an eyewitness account of the birth of the Christ child. There was no way that they could keep from telling about the angels and the Light and the message. When anyone receives a message directly from God, it is difficult not to tell. What made it even more important to tell, would be the fact that they saw with their own eyes the fulfillment of what they were told.

**Luke 2:18 "And all they that heard [it] wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds."**

“All they that heard it wondered”: Wonderment at the mysteries of Christ’s words and works is one of the threads that runs through Luke’s gospel (verses 19:33, 47-48; 1:21, 63; 4:22, 36; 5:9; 8:25; 9:43-45; 11:14; 20:26; 24:12, 41).

These shepherds, giving their testimony, were an amazement to those they told this to. Most people would not have believed they had this experience with these angels. Most believed that only priests and high priests had this type of experience with God. These were common people. They didn't believe because of who they were.

**Luke 2:19 "But Mary kept all these things, and pondered [them] in her heart."**

Mary knew that Jesus was special. She knew that He was the Son of God. She knew this too was special, and she remembered all these events.

**Luke 2:20 "And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them."**

“Praising God”: Luke often reports this response (verses 28; 1:64; 5:25-26; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15-18; 18:43; 19:37-40; 23:47; 24:52-53).

There would be literally years pass before this great happening would be diminished in their memory. Their praising God was because the promise of a Savior had been fulfilled in their very own eyes. This overwhelming presence of God and the message the angel brought would remain with them all of their lives.

## **Luke Chapter 2 Questions**

1. What decree did Caesar Augustus give?
2. In whose time was the law given?
3. Where did each person have to go to pay the tax?
4. Where had Joseph and Mary been living?
5. Where did they go to be taxed?
6. Why did they go to this city?
7. What was the main reason they went there?
8. What book in the Old Testament tells of Jesus being born in Bethlehem?
9. What was Mary to Joseph?
10. Who is Mary pregnant by?
11. What time of year was this?
12. Why does the author believe it was December 25th?
13. In verse 7, Jesus is called Mary's \_\_\_\_\_.
14. What does the word "manger" tell us?
15. We know that Matthew 12:47 tells us that Jesus had \_\_\_\_\_.
16. What were they really to Jesus?
17. In Luke 2:49, we know that Mary was married how many Years?
18. Who was told first of Jesus' birth?
19. Who told them about the birth of Jesus?
20. Many times the presence of the Lord is shown in what?
21. What glory is this presence called, many times?
22. Name one other time the glory of God was seen in a bright Light.
23. What did the angels tell the shepherds first?

24. In Verse 11, what is He called besides Christ the Lord?
25. What suddenly appeared with the angel?
26. Who is this host?
27. How had peace come to the earth?
28. What did the shepherds do when the angels went back to heaven?
29. Why did earthly people want to believe Joseph was Jesus' Father?
30. After the shepherds had seen Jesus, what did they do?
31. How did the people accept it?
32. Why did the shepherds praise God?