



Empowering People to Change the World

## **Breakthrough Christmas**

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## Breakthrough Christmas

### Luke 2:1-14

- The time setting and background all very familiar.
- We know this story all too well, too familiar and we lose the earthiness the robustness of the times and circumstances. We will see that the circumstances of Joseph and Mary are not that different from our own.
- That first Christmas was a breakthrough moment in history. It represents the kind of breakthrough God wants to bring to your life this coming year.

#### Luke 2: 1-2

***<sup>1</sup>And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria.***

- Caesar Augustus is the second of the Caesars and the most powerful. His real name Gaius Octavian.
- His uncle was Julius Caesar, who pulled together the Roman empire and was assassinated 44 years before Christ.
- He left his power to three men: Lepatus, Mark Antony and Octavian.
  - Lepatus failed in his power; Mark Antony joined Cleopatra and fought against Rome.
  - Octavian defeated Mark Antony and Cleopatra's armies.
  - The senate of Rome in 27 BC gave him unprecedented powers as emperor over all of Rome and he ruled for over 41 years.

- Considered the first Emperor of Rome and founder of *Principate* (one single ruler) that governed Rome for the next 300 years.
- Brilliant general, brilliant architect, brilliant politician and ruthless leader.
- Ruthless with no clemency, no freedoms unless granted by Rome.

**Taxation began with Augustus Caesar which was a tremendous financial burden upon Joseph.**

This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

**Luke 2:4**

***Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David***

- This is Joseph's home town from his lineage, because he was of the House of David.
- Rome rules the world ruthless with no mercy, no freedom. You are a slave of Rome.
- We think we have problems today? Over half of all of the Roman territory are slaves!
- These are ruthless, enslaving times.
- Joseph leaves everything familiar. He had been raised in Nazareth and it is where his family and his business is.
- Going "up" to Bethlehem is an important clue about the terrain, meaning more Judean mountains. The range encompasses both Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

- Galilee is north of Jerusalem; Bethlehem is to the south. The shortest route, 70 miles more or less as the crow flies, is through Samaria. Given the antipathy between Jews and Samaritans, Joseph and Mary likely skirted the area and went around the longer way.
- Assuming an average pace of 2.5 mph, 20 miles a day, would mean a trip for the average man of four 8-hour days. But with Mary pregnant, some speculation puts it at 7-10 days.
- Robbers and bandits proliferated the road from Galilee to Bethlehem. Probably they traveled in a caravan for safety.
- The wife did not have to be registered, only the man, the husband. So, technically, Mary did not have to come but Joseph knew the prophecy, written 500 years before.

**Micah 5:2**

***But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,  
Yet out of you shall come forth to Me  
The One to be Ruler in Israel,  
Whose goings forth are from of old,  
From everlasting.”***

- God is leading Joseph. God is bringing Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem! Caesar Augustus is only a pawn in God’s mighty work.
  - God is fulfilling His will. Caesar is only the backdrop being used by God. Caesar Augustus is only a footnote to the drama of the ages.
  - This is just Caesar’s Pizza. He was nothing, just a footnote in history.

- Today, our government has taxes and our life is full of inconveniences. Life can be hard, but God is setting you up for a breakthrough! Are you ready for His breakthrough in your life?
- The drama of the ages is God's work through Mary!

### **Luke 2:5**

***to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.***

- They are espoused, engaged and they were not to consummate the marriage until the ceremony.
- But she's great with child—this is a disgrace! Shameful.

### **This is a Breakthrough Christmas:**

- **God does His greatest work in hard times, ruthless times.**
- **God often uses shame and disgrace to do His deepest work—a breakthrough.**
- **God does His miraculous when you need a miracle: economically, socially and relationally.**
- **God calls us to leave the familiar and trust him.**
- **God wants to do miracles with those who will surrender to Him.**

### **Luke 2:6-7**

***<sup>6</sup>So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. <sup>7</sup>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.***

- Inn, not the Holiday Inn, but the “Cataluma”
  - The Cataluma where caravans would meet.
  - It had a courtyard of stables, a fountain in the middle, with little stone enclosures like one-room places for people.

- Cannot even find a place there in the Cataluma.
  - Homeless; Joseph and Mary are homeless; Jesus is homeless.
- They find a cave—a popular spot for shepherds to keep their animals.
  - Mary is around 15 years old—no privacy, no doctor, no OBGYN.
  - What about infections? It is unclean and it is dirty.
  - Manger was a stone mantle about 2 x 2 feet.
  - God himself comes in human flesh in this place.

**“she wrapped him in swaddling clothes”**

- An interesting speculation by those familiar with Jewish tradition at the time is that the priests of the temple would set aside strips from their used, embroidered, liturgical vestment to be given as a gift to their newborn Davidic king.
- If this was true, then perhaps Zacharias, who was a priest and Elizabeth, a relative of Mary, who had also met with Mary before her birth (Luke 1) gave these priestly strips to Mary, the Mother of their God and King, for His Holy Birth.
- Mary would have had these torn clothes, from the priests, from the Temple, ready for the birth, but it doesn't end here.

**Luke 2:8-13**

***<sup>8</sup>Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. <sup>10</sup>Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. <sup>11</sup>For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ***

***the Lord. <sup>12</sup>And this will be a sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:***

- And this shall be a sign unto you? He says that the “swaddling clothes” would be a “sign”?
- There is a tradition that the shepherds, who in the hillside were not too far from Jerusalem, provided the “lambs without blemish” for the temple sacrifice at Passover.
- That first new-born lamb, to protect it from blemish (as it was required to be by the Law), was wrapped in swaddling cloth and placed in a food trough apart from the other sheep. Ah, this would be a sign indeed!
- They would find the Savior, Christ the Lord, wrapped just like they wrapped their own precious lamb after its birth.
- An unblemished lamb/king wrapped in swaddling clothes! The shepherds would have known this as a “sign” of a Davidic King.

**This same Jesus wants to bring a breakthrough in our lives:**

- You do have room for Jesus! You made room in your life today.
- The breakthrough of Christmas is that if we will make room for Jesus in our crowded lives, He will birth a miracle in your life.
- These may be ruthless times, hard days at work, in your marriage, in your relationships.
- May this be your beginning! Breakthrough in the coming year, starting today!
  - **Just like Mary and Joseph, an unfamiliar journey.**
  - **A road less traveled.**
  - **Just like the shepherds, fear and anxiety.**

- **A breakthrough of joy!**
- **Have you surrendered to the newborn King?**
- **Give your heart to Christ, get baptized.**
- **Join us January 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Tuesday—Friday, as we meet for worship and have “The Breakthrough Start.”**