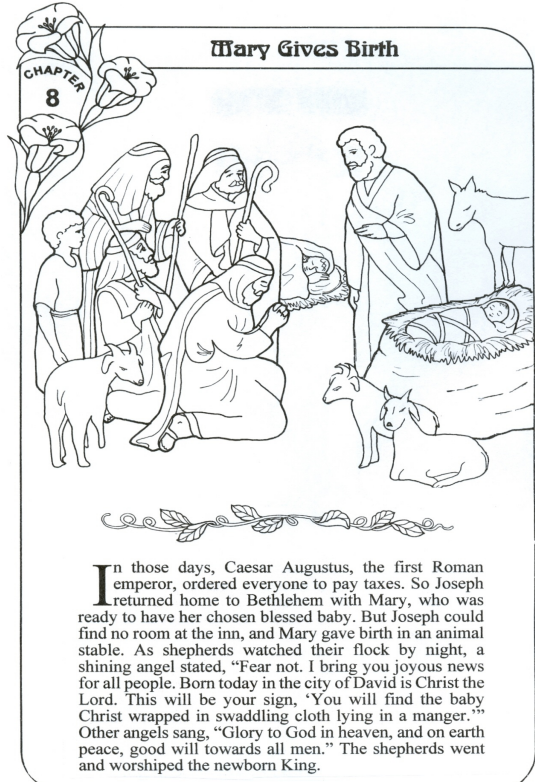


When Caesar Augustus ordered taxes to be paid, Joseph returned home to Bethlehem. Arriving, the virgin Mary was ready to have her chosen blessed baby. Finding no room at the Inn, Mary give birth in an animal stable. The baby Christ was wrapped in swaddling cloth and laid in a manger. As an angel told Shepherds, who were watching their flock by night, other angles sang God’s praise. As told, the Christ child was found lying in a manger.

Luke 02:01-20 Teaching Guide (Map 1)
8 Copyright ©1991JonathanB.Hobbs



In those days, Caesar Augustus, the first Roman emperor, ordered everyone to pay taxes. So Joseph returned home to Bethlehem with Mary, who was ready to have her chosen blessed baby. But Joseph could find no room at the inn, and Mary gave birth in an animal stable. As shepherds watched their flock by night, a shining angel stated, “Fear not. I bring you joyous news for all people. Born today in the city of David is Christ the Lord. This will be your sign, ‘You will find the baby Christ wrapped in swaddling cloth lying in a manger.’” Other angels sang, “Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace, good will towards all men.” The shepherds went and worshiped the newborn King.

Luke 02:01-20 Teaching Guide (Map 1)
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8.

Mary Gives Birth

“Bible Notes” – A Summary Study Guide

In those days Caesar Augustus, the first Roman emperor, sent out a decree from Rome that instructed everyone to return to his birthplace to be taxed. Cyrenius, a Roman consul, the governor of Syria, supervised the collection in Judea.

Since he had descended from the house of King David, Joseph and his 8 ½ month pregnant wife slowly began the difficult ninety-mile journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. [The town stood atop a low but rather steep ridge. Although small, Bethlehem was a busy place, being on the caravan route to Egypt. Travelers lodged in the inn or caravansary with its large courtyard, which had been built and maintained for 1,000 years since the days of King David. There stood the tomb of Ruth, the Moabitess, and in the valley below lay the field of Boaz, where the couple had first met, married and begot Obed, the grandfather of king David (Ruth 4:1-10).]



Mary was great with child. Arriving in town, Joseph found no room for them at the inn. So Mary gave birth in baby Christ's cradle. As shepherds in the field watched their flock by night an angel shining forth God's glory all about him terrified them. He stated "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the city of David a Savior has been born to you. He is the Christ, the Lord. This will be a sign you. You will find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:10-12). [Spiritually, the swaddling cloth symbolized that the baby Christ was being bound in the sins of the world.]

Suddenly a host of angels appeared, praising God by saying "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward all men" (Luke 2:14). As the angels left the shepherds said "Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing which the Lord has made known to us!" Quickly they came and found Mary, Joseph and the Christ baby lying in a manger.

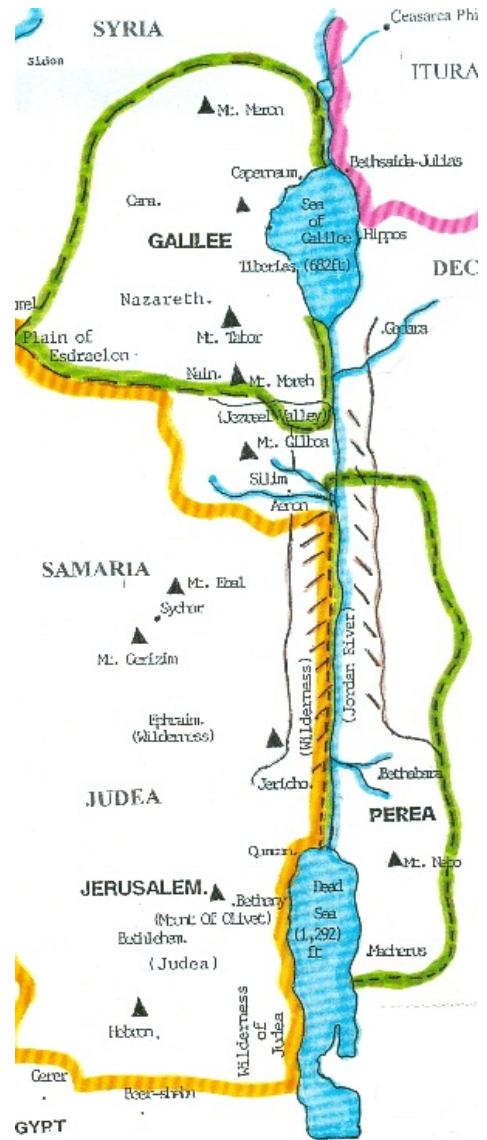
After worshipping the Christ child, the shepherds spread the news everywhere. Everyone wondered about their words. Mary too pondered these things in her heart. Then the shepherds returned to their scattered flocks, glorifying and praising God for what they had witnessed.

**Sermon#8,
Biblical Scriptures:**

Gospel of Luke - Chapter 2.

1. And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the would should be taxed. 2. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) 3. And all went to be taxed, everyone into his own city. 4. And 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.) 5. To Mary his espoused wife, being greatly pregnant with a child. 6. And so it was that by the time they arrived, the days of Mary's pregnancy were accomplished that she should be delivered. 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. 8. And there were in the same country shepherds staying in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9. And, look, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. And they were very afraid. 10. And the angel said to them, "Fear not for behold, I

bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11. For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. 12. And this shall be a sign to you: 'You shall find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.'" 13. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 14. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." 15. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go even to Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord has made know to us!" 16. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and babe lying in a manger. 17. And when they had seen [the manger scene], they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. 18. And all that heard the news wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. 20. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told to them.



Mary Gives Birth

[Jesus, The Promised Messiah]

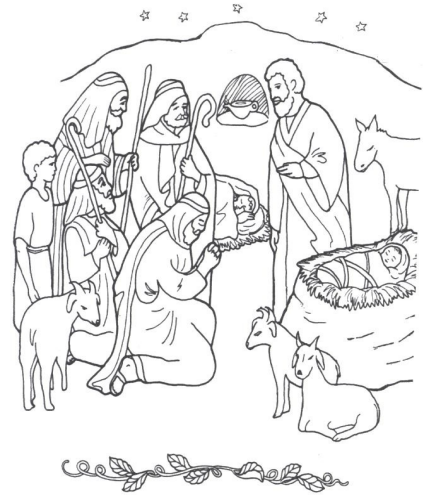
In the year 8 B.C., Caesar Augustus, being the first emperor of Rome declared that all lands under Roman domination were to be taxed via a census. (see Luke 2:1) In a Roman palace in Italy, scribes meticulously documented Caesar’s every word, which were to be recopied on numerous scrolls. Upon completion, Augustus’ orders were loaded on ships along with other supplies and sent to all the seaports throughout Rome’s territories including Caesarea some 1500 Nordic miles to the east. Sailing down the Italian peninsula 350 miles to southern tip of Calabria to the south of Italy, they crossed through the narrow Strait of Messina separating Italy from the huge island of Sicily to the south. Continuing eastward another 460 miles, they came upon the island of Crete. Six hundred and fifty miles still remained in the long voyage as the island of Cyprus laid just 400 miles to the northeast. Weeks later, these Roman galleys under sail and oars slowly entered Herod the Great’s magnificent seacoast harbor of Caesarea, Rome’s capital city in Judea, and Caesar Augustus’ message was delivered.

[*Author’s Reflections:* Caesar Augustus was consider the most brilliant tax strategist of the Roman Empire. In all probability, the 8 B.C. census is believed the one mention in the gospel of Luke, because in all likelihood it would have taken several years for the bureaucracy of the census to reach the stiff-neck people of the Promised Land. Regardless, Caesar Augustus had issued a worldwide decree that for a second time there would be a 5% inheritance tax on estates, something beyond the normal taxation. (Julius Caesar only had a 1% tax.) Such a taxation would require a census to register transferable assets, such as land, and to record genealogies to establish “the nearest relatives.” As the benefactor, this taxation would have had the full support of the Roman military, as this inheritance tax also provide retirement funds for the military. This tax would extended to gifts to children and spouses. Caesar’s 5% tax was to be on the estates, as noted by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus. The census attached to this taxation was also noted by the gospel of Luke. The peoples of Judea and Galilee were already being taxed, and this new Roman act of greed was not received lightly.]

As the Roman authority received their emperor’s command by 6 B.C., mounted Roman soldiers departed from the walled city in every direction carrying scrolls for this rich and prosperous province. These riders sped through the plains of Samaria for Galilee, the Jordan Valley, Judea and Jerusalem and Augustus’ mandate was read to the many villages and cities in various languages for all to understand. The entire census would take two years to complete. This was implemented when Cyrenius, governor of Syria,³⁹ displayed Rome’s might as he oversaw the tax collection in Judea. So everyone went to the city of his or her birth. (see Luke 2:2-3)

By 5 B.C., Joseph of Bethlehem left the hilltop community of Nazareth for his ancestral birthplace, the city of King David of Judea. Mary, his pregnant wife who was almost at full term, accompanied him. The slow, 70-mile journey lasted at least one full week.

Averaging only ten miles a day, the journey was a long and difficult one for Mary, who was in the latter stages of pregnancy. She rode to Bethlehem mounted on a donkey. Days into their journey, Joseph followed the Jordan River through the Ghor Valley and lodged outside the city of Jericho beneath some palm trees. The next two days were spent rising through the wilderness of Judea. This proved very trying for the young couple. Six days later, Joseph came upon Bethany on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives and rested the night.



³⁹ A Roman consul, who held the position of governor of Syria for several years.

The next day, Joseph rounded the Mount of Olives and led Mary past the massive Roman Antonia Fortress on the northern side of Jerusalem. Turning west, the road led south, paralleling the Western Wall from about 150 yards away. They slowly passed the palace of Herod the Great. Farther along the wall, they passed the huge moat pool 120 yards outside the lower portion of the city. Guards perched in towers saw the pregnant Jewish couple in the distance but thought nothing of it.

The remaining miles proved extremely difficult. Joseph had to stop many times as Mary began to feel the first signs that her moment to deliver was near. Hours later, Joseph and Mary reached the town of Bethlehem, because he was of the lineage of king David. (see Luke 2:4)

A cluster of boxlike, whitewashed houses, Bethlehem stood atop a low, but rather steep ridge. Although small, Bethlehem was a busy place. Caravans traveling to Egypt often stopped and lodged in its hospices and inn. It had been built in the days of King David, nearly a thousand years earlier. Repaired and rebuilt, it had remained in use over the centuries. The tomb of Ruth the Moabitess was in the little town. In the valley below lay the field of Boaz, where the couple first met.⁴⁰ According to the gospel of Matthew, Boaz, the husband of Ruth and grandfather of King David, is mentioned in the genealogy of the Christ. It would be from this union, that the Lion of the tribe of Judah,⁴¹ the Messiah would come from. But now, the couple could hardly believe their eyes. The once tiny town had swollen into a crammed city due to the censuses.

As Joseph and Mary were about to enter Bethlehem to be taxed, helmeted and armed Roman sentries stood guard. The town's square and marketplace was a scene of noisy confusion, consisting of uniformed Roman soldiers and officials, wealthy Jews from Egypt, Greece and Rome, aristocratic families from Jerusalem, peasants and craftsmen from rural Judea, Galilee and Perea. Within this sea of people, the need for food and provisions only added to the chaos.

Arriving at Bethlehem, Mary was great with child and ready to deliver her *firstborn* child as she began to experience a first sharp, gripping pain throughout her abdomen and lower back. (see Luke 2:5) After searching the town and inquiring at the gateway of the inn, Joseph learned there were no available rooms anywhere. (The inn of the gospel story was an eastern caravansary or hospice. Being a large square building, a guest would pass through a strong gateway of the inn to a large courtyard. In the center was a spacious raised platform, used for sleeping upon at night or prayer devotions during the day. Around the court were rooms on both the ground level and upper in chambers. The inn was located at the edge of the square and bustled with activity.)

So Joseph found a cave, an eastern stable, on the outskirts of the town not far from its lush grasslands. A feeding trough notched in the cave's wall served as a manger. After hours of labor, a mid-wife helped Mary bore her firstborn son and wrapped the infant Christ in swaddling clothes, or binding strips of cloth. Then they laid the babe in a manger. [*Author's Reflections:* Spiritually, Mary had given birth to an infant formed by the Holy Ghost, as was told to Joseph by the angel Gabriel⁴² in a dream. At the moment of birth, as the newborn cleared the birth carnal, the Word of the LORD God, Jesus, came down from heaven (see John 6:38, 51, 62), and his spirit instantly entered the infant's fleshly body. The Lord Jesus had left the right hand of God's majestic throne (Mark 16:19; Psalm 110:1) to become flesh,⁴³ and covered himself with the sins of the world. But in no way does this diminish in anyway Mary's awesome role of being the greatest woman ever born.]

⁴⁰ Ruth 4:1-10.

⁴¹ Rev. 5:1-9.

⁴² Matthew 1:20-21.

⁴³ John 1:13.

As was the custom, newborn infants were wrapped in strips of cloth to keep their limbs straight as depicted in the book of Ezekiel.⁴⁴ Here, the umbilical cord was cut and the infant washed before being rubbed down with salt. Next, the baby Christ was wrapped in strips of cloth to prevent the limbs from moving. [*Author's Reflections*: Spiritually, the wrapping of the baby Christ in swaddling clothes symbolized him was bound in the sins of the world.]

Meanwhile, shepherds were staying in the nearby fields, watching their flock by night. They wore rough woolen sleeveless tunics, which smelled of the animals they attended and on their feet they had heavily soiled leather sandals. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord descended upon them as the Most High's glory shone, which terrified the shepherds. The angel said, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the city of David a Savior has been born to you. He is the Christ, the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." (**Luke 2:10-12**)

Suddenly, a multitude of the heavenly host appeared, praising the LORD God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (**Luke 2:14**) The angelic figures ascended into the night sky and out of sight.

The shepherds said one to another, "Let us go to Bethlehem, and see this thing, which the Lord has made known to us!" Hastily abandoning their flocks, they searched the nearby caves until they found one occupied by a couple with a newborn baby. These men saw the baby Christ exactly as they had been told they would. The infant was in a feeding trough, using the manger as a cradle. With their staff still in their hands, these rugged men bowed down on one knee in humble gratitude.

Sometime before sunrise, the shepherds left the cave and spread the word of the Christ's arrival throughout the region, which included Bethlehem's swollen population and the lower city of Jerusalem. When the people heard of this startling event, they wondered if it was true. Eventually, spies working for the chief priest, Pharisees and Herod the Great overheard the tale and reported it back to their authorities. All would have believed it to be mere gossip, but inwardly Herod the Great, for the second time in only six months, heard a story about the coming Christ.

Meanwhile, Mary treasured the shepherds' words and pondered them within her heart. (see Luke 2:19) In the morning, once Mary and the baby Jesus had been fed and cared for, Joseph left the cave and entered Bethlehem to register himself and his family for the Roman census. Here, shopkeepers lined the bustling square, hawking their wares as a constant stream of travelers, like Joseph, entered the town. Heavily armed Roman soldiers were on hand to deter any troublemakers as the empire's tax money was being collected. As he stood in line, Joseph heard whispers of the birth of a possible Christ child, but kept quiet. When his turn came, Joseph registered his name and family size before he paid the required tax money. Finished, Joseph quickly returned to the cave and Mary.

Later that day, the shepherds began returning to their fields and found a great portion of their flock scattered among the hillside and pastureland. They quickly assumed the task of gathering their herds. When this was complete, they jubilantly glorified the LORD God, for all of the things that they had seen and heard from the angels.

[*Author's Reflections*: Adult female sheep are referred to as ewes, and can weigh about 100 pounds. The rams and ewes generally mate once a year in July–August and give birth to one lamb because sheep need help giving birth. (Twin births are most common in well-fed flocks.) Ewes generally give birth to single lambs when pasture emerge in the springtime and were watched carefully by night by the shepherds, as the newborn lamb's early awkward skipping-over steps would have made them easy prey for any wild predator. Here the flock's future produce is at its most vulnerable. Birthing is also called parturition, as ewes give birth to lambs at this point in the spring. At this time, the barley begins to ripen in the Land of Israel. During the rest of the year, the flock of sheep are kept in pens during the night and led out in the morning to pasture by the shepherd. This possibly makes the original birth of the Christ-child to be somewhere between March and June.]

From his spy network, a lightly seasoned tale of the Christ's arrival would have shortly reached Jerusalem's priests and King Herod the Great, who once again would have outwardly denounced such a story. Yet a growing seed of concern and hatred was beginning to fester within this tyrant's heart.

⁴⁴ Ezekiel 16:4.

[Author's Reflections: A special note must be payed to the belief about the birth time of the Christ child.⁴⁵ December 25th has been celebrated as the date of Jesus' birth since the 4th century. It wasn't until 440 A.D. that the church officially proclaimed December 25th as the birth of Christ by the new Roman-Catholic church. Here, traditional Christianity would keep some of the Little Flock's teachings of the gospel, but also adopted numerous traditions from previous pagan religions. Well before the spreading of Jesus' gospel message, December 25th had already hosted two other related festivals; the birthday of Mithras, the Iranian "Sun of Righteousness" whose worship was popular with Roman legions and the Roman festival, Sol Invictus, the birth of the "unconquerable sun." (This is also the name of the Canaanite sun god called "Baal," The Invincible Sun, who is sometimes depicted driving a chariot drawn by four horses.)

Secondly, this holiday marked the time of winter solstice, the sun's triumph over darkness and the shortest day of the year, which falls just a few days earlier. Regardless, keeping any such pagan celebration for any reason is strictly forbidden by the Heavenly Father.⁴⁶ Ironically, the blending of paganism within the LORD's gospel message would sadly lead most Christians away from the "Strait Gate (Matthew 7:13-14), which only a few obedient Christians will find.]

⁴⁵ John 1:13.

⁴⁶ Exodus 20:1, Deuteronomy 12:31-32.