

JESUS IS BORN!

No event in the history of the world has been so celebrated in word and song as the birth of Jesus Christ! In his Gospel, Luke tells the story of the birth of Jesus in the simplest words: “*she gave birth to her firstborn, a Son.*” So the Son of God enters our world in utter humility and without fanfare.

It was a census ordered by Caesar Augustus, ruler of the Roman Empire from 27 BC to AD 14, which brought Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The purpose of this census was made for purposes of taxation. Everyone went to his own town to register on the tax rolls. Mary and Joseph made this journey of about 80 miles from their home city in Galilee to the ancient city of Bethlehem, family home of the famous King David. Here this child, whose kingdom would be far greater than that of His ancestor, was born. It was to fulfill God’s Old Testament promise that the Messiah was born in Bethlehem, not Nazareth.

Critics of the Bible have found fault with Luke’s mention of Quirinius as being governor of Syria when this census was taken. Historical records list Quirinius as the governor of Syria about 10 years *after* the death of King Herod; a census was taken at that time (AD 6/7). Since Jesus was born while Herod was king (who died about 4 BC), some claim that Luke makes a mistake here. But before coming to this conclusion, one must take into account several possibilities: (1) Luke calls this the “first” census while Quirinius was governor of Syria; Quirinius may have had an earlier tour of duty in Syria, a hint of which is found in an ancient document. (2) Some learned Greek scholars suggest that the word *first* might better be translated as “prior”; the translation would then be: “this census was *prior to* Quirinius being governor of Syria.” We moderns hardly have all the facts available to us from two thousand years ago; we dare not stand in judgment of Luke, who writes by inspiration of God’s Spirit and has “*carefully investigated everything from the beginning,*” (1:3).

After the birth of Jesus, His mother *wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger*. The Old English word *swaddle* means to bind an infant in lengths of bandage. As a sign of tender care, babies were washed, rubbed with salt (and possibly olive oil), and then wrapped (cf. Ezk 16:4). Strips of cloth were wrapped tightly around infants to warm and secure them.

Only at the end of the story do we find out that the inns were all full in Bethlehem. This necessitated their using a less suitable place for shelter. So it was among the animals that Jesus was born; He was bedded in a manger, a feeding trough for cattle. Is it any wonder that this scene has captured the imagination of artists and poets! But we must not be so fascinated by romanticised versions of this event that we miss its true significance: **here is the Word of God made flesh for us and for our salvation.** Glory be to God on high!