

Luke 2:1-20 – The Birth

Questions & Answers

1. Caesar Augustus, unbeknownst to him, was a vessel used by God to ensure Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus. How can you look back at your life and see God working behind the scenes to bring you to where you are now?

Personal.

2. Culturally, what would have taken place when Joseph returned to the “city of David”?

Joseph was returning to the village of his origin. In the Middle East, historical memories are long, and the extended family, with its connection to its village of origin, is important. In such a world a man like Joseph could have appeared in Bethlehem, and told people, “I am Joseph, son of Heli, son of Matthat, the son of Levi” and most homes in town would be open to him.

Joseph was a “royal.” That is, he was from the family of King David. The family of David was so famous in Bethlehem that local folk apparently called the town the “City of David” (as often happens). The official name of the village was Bethlehem. Everyone knew that the Hebrew Scriptures referred to Jerusalem as the “City of David.” Yet locally, many apparently called Bethlehem the “City of David.” Being of that famous family, Joseph would have been welcomed anywhere in town.¹

3. Luke says that Jesus was laid in a manger because “there was no place for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7). How has our western interpretation of this passage tainted our understanding?

There is a trap in the traditional language. “No room in the inn” has taken on the meaning of “the inn had a number of rooms and all were occupied.” The “no vacancy sign” was already “switched on” when Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem. But the Greek word does not refer to “a room in an inn” but rather to “space” as in “There is no space on my desk for my new computer.” The Greek word in Luke 2:7 that is commonly translated “inn” is *katalyma*. This is not the ordinary word for a commercial inn. If Luke expected his readers to think Joseph was turned away from an “inn” he would have used the word *pandocheion*, which clearly meant a commercial inn. Literally, *katalyma* is simply “a place to stay” and can refer to many types of shelters. Here, the key word, *katalyma*, is defined; it is “an upper room,” which is clearly a guest room in a private home.

To summarize, a part of what Luke tells us about the birth of Jesus is that the holy family traveled to Bethlehem, where they were received into a private home. The child was born, wrapped and (literally) “put to bed” in the living room manger that was either built into the floor or made of wood and moved into the family living space. Why weren’t they invited into the family guest room, the reader might naturally ask? The answer is that the guest room was already occupied by other guests. The host family graciously accepted Mary and Joseph into the family room of their home.²

¹ Bailey, Kenneth. *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008, 26.

² *Ibid.*, 32-34.

4. In your own words, explain how the shepherds would have viewed Jesus as a gift from God above. Do you feel this way about the coming of Christ? Explain.

Personal.

5. In what ways will you apply the message of the sermon to your life this coming week? Who will keep you accountable?

Personal.