

Prayer Study #120

IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but, after their own lusts, shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears fro, the truth and shall be turned unto fables.

2nd Timothy 4:3

Two Kinds of Time

1. chronos: the order in which things happen
2. kairos: season or special occasion, also sometimes referred to as “accepted time,” “due time,” “time at hand,” “fullness of time”

The Author of Luke

The Christmas Story contained in Luke 2 was written by Luke. Some believe his Gospel book is the most beautiful book in the world. Less is known about him than any other New Testament writer. He was a Gentile and probably the brother of Titus. He was a physician and probably a man of wealth. His writings are very exact and scholarly. He writes the only “Gentile” Gospel, and his mission was to proclaim the humanity of Christ and to portray Him as the Man who came to save (Luke 15:1 & 19:10).

LUKE 2:1-20 from The Message

About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazereth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David’s town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel. There were shepherders camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God’s angel stood among them, and God’s glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, “Don’t be afraid. I’m here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David’s town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you’re to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger.” At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God’s praises: “Glory to God in the heavenly heights. Peace to all men

and women on earth who please Him.” As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherders talked it over. “Let’s get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us.” They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherders were impressed. Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The shepherders returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they’d been told!

The author of Matthew

Matthew was a Hebrew. He is also known as Levi. He was in one of the most despised occupation of the day. He was a tax collector. Most of the tax collectors of the day were extortionists. They were further hated because they worked for the Roman government. Jesus called him out of this line of work. Matthew was so grateful that he gave a big banquet in his own home. Matthew’s gospel is the only gospel that gives us the Parables of the Kingdom.

MATTHEW 2:1

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory-this was during Herod’s kingship-a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. They asked around, “Where can we find and pay homage to the new-born King of the Jews? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signaled his birth. We’re on pilgrimage to worship him.” When word of their inquiry got to Herod, he was terrified-and not Herod alone, but most of Jerusalem as well. Herod lost no time. He gathered all the high priests and religion scholars in the city together and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?” They told him, “Bethlehem, Judah territory. The prophet Micah wrote it plainly:

It’s you, Bethlehem, in Judah’s land,
No longer bringing up the rear.
From you will come the leader

Who will shepherd-rule my people, my Israel.

Herod then arranged a secret meeting with the scholars from the East. Pretending to be as devout as they were, he got them to tell him exactly when the birth-announcement star appeared. Then he told them the prophecy about Bethlehem, and said, “Go find this child. Leave no stone unturned. As soon as you find him, send word and I’ll join you at once in

your worship.” Instructed by the king, they set off. Then the star appeared again, the same star they had seen in the eastern skies. It led them on until it hovered over the place of the child. They could hardly contain themselves: They were in the right place! They had arrived at the right time! They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they kneeled and worshiped him. Then they opened their luggage and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, myrrh. In a dream, they were warned not to report back to Herod. So they worked out another route, left the territory without being seen, and returned to their own country. After the scholars were gone, God’s angel showed up again in Joseph’s dream and commanded, “Get up. Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt. Stay until further notice. Herod is on the hunt for the child and wants to kill him.” Joseph obeyed. He got up, took the child and his mother under cover of darkness. They were out of town and well on their way by daylight. They lived in Egypt until Herod’s death. This Egyptian exile fulfilled what Hosea had preached, “I called my son out of Egypt.” Herod, when he realized that the scholars had tricked him, flew in a rage. He commanded the murder of every little boy two years old and under who lived in Bethlehem and its surrounding hills. (He determined that age from information he’d gotten from the scholars.) That’s when Jeremiah’s sermon was fulfilled:

*“A sound was heard in Ramah,
weeping and much lament,
Rachel weeping for her children,
Rachel refusing all solace.
Her children gone, dead and buried.”*

Later, when Herod died, God’s angel appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. “Up, take the child and his mother and return to Israel. All those out to murder the child are dead. Joseph obeyed. He got up, took the child and his mother, and reentered Israel. When he heard, though that Archelaus had succeeded his father, Herod, as king in Judea, he was afraid to go there. But then Joseph was directed in a dream to go to the hills of Galilee. On arrival he settled in the village of Nazareth. This move was a fulfillment of the prophetic word, “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

Based in part on Paul Maier's *The First Christmas*

- I. Characters
 - a. Caesar Augustus and the Pax Romana
 - b. Mary
 - c. Joseph
 - d. The Angels
 - e. The Shepherds
 - f. The Wise Men
 - g. Herod
 - h. Anna
 - i. Simeon
- II. The Places
 - a. Palestine
 - b. Nazareth
 - c. Bethlehem
- III. The Galilean Couple
 - a. The engagement
 - b. The annunciation
 - c. The marriage
- IV. The Timing
 - a. Year
 - b. Date
 - c. The Star

Because Judeo-Christianity has so thoroughly influenced Western culture, we are prone to imagine that all other world religions have a similarly solid historical base. This is by no means the case. It can in fact, be argued that every religious system before or since Judaism and Christianity has avoided any significant interaction with history, and instead has asked its followers to believe, by sheer faith alone, the claimed revelations of its founder(s). This is true of the mythologies of yesterday and the cults of today, the religions of the East or the "New Age" of the West.

Or, whenever links with genuine history are claimed-as in several modern belief systems today-these are never verified by secular history or the findings of archaeology....Rather than any private, once-for-all revelation, Judeo-Christianity's Scriptures encompass a two-thousand-year-plus period-two millennia in which its holy books constantly interlaced themselves with history.

Paul Maier

Caesar Augustus was the first emperor of Rome. He ordered all of the Roman world to report back to their ancestral homes. Joseph and Mary were both distant descendants of the much-married King David, and Bethlehem was his city, 6 miles southwest of Jerusalem. The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem is 80 miles. The whole area of Palestine was under Rome's control and ruled by a local king, Herod the Great. Augustus perhaps ordered this census because he was alarmed at the declining marriage and birth rates in his empire. Roman men of the day were very promiscuous and preferred "running around" instead of marriage. Augustus tried to stem this tide by conferring some political advantages on married fathers of at least three children, by penalizing the rights of bachelors to inherit, and by refusing to give bachelors good seats at the games. The bachelors retaliated by "marrying" infant girls so Augustus set the minimum age for engagement at 10 for girls. His census probably was a way to see if his policies were working. Augustus wanted to be remembered for 35 acts. The censuses that he took were in 8th place. At the time of Augustus' death in 14 AD, Jesus was about 19. Augustus certainly would not have heard of Jesus and would be astounded to know that later ages would assign his own death to 14 AD (in the year of our Lord) instead of 767 AUC (ab urbe condita) from the founding of the city.

Mary was a distant cousin of King David and of Joseph's and a cousin of Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist. She was probably around 15 or 16. She was told by the angel that she was going to be pregnant with the Messiah when the Holy Spirit came upon her. This announcement by the angel is celebrated by Christians as the Annunciation and is on March 25, 9 months from Christmas Day.

Joseph was probably about 25. When he discovered that Mary was pregnant, and he was not the father, he had three choices: 1) He could marry the girl quickly and hope the gossip in Nazareth would soon stop over a 6 month baby; 2) He could publically divorce her as an adulteress, and Mary would be stoned; 3) He could have the marriage contract set aside quickly, and send Mary off somewhere else where she was not known. Before being warned in a dream, he decided to do the latter.

The Angels announced to the world that Messiah had been born.

The Shepherds kept long hours and protected their sheep from ravaging animals and robbers by using staffs and sling or a metal studded club. They almost always had sheepdogs who were almost as effective as the shepherds in protecting the flock.

The Wise Men did not arrive on Christmas night. It seems from the reading of scripture that they did not arrive until after Jesus' presentation at the temple which was 40 days after his birth. We do not think there were only 3 because people did not travel in small groups like that because of safety reasons. Also they most probably did not come from as far away as the Orient but no one really knows what country they were from, perhaps Iran, Iraq, or one of the other Middle Eastern countries. The early church fathers considered them Persians or Iranians. In fact the reason invading armies from Persia did not destroy the Church of the Nativity in 614 was that they saw a golden mosaic over the doorway, depicting the wise men in Persian headdress. They also could have been Babylonians, or Iraqis because the Babylonians were most advanced in astrology.

King Herod is perhaps the most villainous of the characters in the Christmas story. He mistrusted everyone and thought himself surrounded by young aspirants all plotting to seize his throne. When the Wise Men did not return to tell Herod where the Messiah was, he went into a rage and ordered all male babies 2 years old or younger in Bethlehem to be slaughtered. Bethlehem at the time had about 2000 people so scholars think about 20 babies were killed. Killing was nothing new for Herod. He was so jealous of his favorite wife that he killed her himself, along with her mother, her grandfather, his brother-in-law, and three of his sons, along with numerous subjects. During a swimming party at Jericho, he also drowned the high priest, who also happened to be one of his brothers in law. The real villain behind all these murders was Herod's sister Salome, who was so jealous of Herod's wives that she sowed seeds of suspicion and lies about everyone in the Jerusalem palace. He was always wanting to kill his sons and writing to Rome for permission that Augustus said of him, "I'd rather be Herod's pig than his son. When he became old and ill from arteriosclerosis, Herod worried that no one would mourn his death so he issued orders from his deathbed that leaders from all parts of Judea

were to be locked inside the great hippodrome at Jericho. When he died, archers were to massacre these thousands in cold blood, so that there would be universal mourning associated with his death. Fortunately, his orders were not carried out. He finally died when his digestive system and private parts rotted and blocked his breathing.

Anna was married for only 7 years and remained a widow for 84 years. This means that she must have been over one hundred years old when her failing eyes beheld the Savior she had long for.

Simeon waited for years when religion was at a low ebb in Israel because of his prophetic spirit to bless the Savior of the World. Are we found patiently waiting for the second coming of this Christ?

The Places

Palestine is called the Holy Land by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. It is located in the juncture of two continents, Asia and Africa. It is roughly the size and shape of Vermont turned upside down. It is the land that gave the world monotheism and a system of ethics that has not been superceded. Almost all laws in America are based on a corollary of the 10 commandments. Palestine lies in the same parallel as Georgia, but the Mediterranean Sea affects the climate there greatly. The winters are usually cool but moderate with some rain. The summer has sunshine 98% of the time.

Nazareth was an insignificant, poor village in the time of Jesus. One of his disciples asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" It was a small town where everyone knew everyone else because the village well was the only source of water and everyone met there to draw water. Today Nazareth has about 57,000 inhabitants.

Bethlehem, one of the most famous towns in the whole world, until recently was predominantly Christian in a Jewish state. It is about 6 miles southwest of Jerusalem. This is what Paul Maier says about it, "Each Christmas, Bethlehem decks itself in colored lights, glass lanterns, glittering stars, and illuminated crosses, while it swells in size because of the influx of Christian pilgrims. On Christmas Eve, a Protestant carol service is conducted at twilight on a hillside at the Shepherds' Fields, and again at 9 PM in an outer court of the Church of the Nativity.

Meanwhile, the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem leads a colorful procession from the Holy City to Bethlehem in order to conduct a midnight Mass in the Church of the Nativity, a celebration transmitted by closed-circuit television to a large screen in Manger Square for the benefit of the thousands who cannot crowd inside the basilica. At the same time, the Grotto has been filled with humanity for most of Christmas Eve, as groups from all over the world read the Christmas story in a babble of foreign tongues. Exactly at midnight, a silver bell tinkles in the Grotto, heralding Christ's birthday, and many of the pilgrims are overcome as they spirit themselves back two thousand years and try to find a place between the shepherds at the mangerside. A few move forward to try to press their lips to the metallic star marker. Then church bells peal forth throughout the city, since the people of Bethlehem are predominantly Christian.

The Galilean Couple

Engagements were worked out between fathers of families. Only divorce could break an engagement. Marriage was considered a covenant between two families, not just between the bridal pair. Physical intimacy was allowed between the engaged couple, but most conservative Galileans, such as most probably those in Nazareth, deemed the practice before marriage unacceptable. Marriage was more like than different from today's weddings with wedding attendants, a bridal veil, and a wedding feast.

The Timing

Herod died in 4 BC. Therefore Jesus was probably born in 5-4 BC. The calendar error was made by a 6th Century monk, Dionysius who made a mathematical error. Since the 300s AD, Christmas has been celebrated on December 25th in the West and January 6th in parts of the East. The December 25th date may have been put in place to take the place of a Roman festival. Some speculate that Jesus was born in the spring, while others insist he was born in the fall of 5 BC.