

LUKE 2:1-7
DESTINATION BETHLEHEM—A STABLE

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”¹

All history focuses on one singular point as time and eternity meet to commemorate the birth of a child. It has been rightly said that history is His story. Had one of our contemporaries written the account of the birth of the Son of God, that one would no doubt have arranged for the child to be born in a castle, or perhaps in the home of some powerful, notable individual so that the child would have every advantage to promote His agenda. However, we are cautioned that God’s thoughts are not our thoughts; neither are His ways our ways [see **ISAIAH 55:8**]. God chose the most humble of circumstances for the advent of His Son. The Son of God had neither material advantage nor stature when He came into this needy world. Few were looking for His advent, though God had repeatedly told of His coming through the millennia prior to His birth.

The text before us introduces us to the people who were living within a conquered nation as His heritage, a disgraced mother as His caregiver and protector, a sheepcote as His castle, and a manger as His royal couch. Could any more humble situation be imagined for the advent of the King of kings? Yet, it pleased the Lord God of heaven and earth to send His Son in such humble circumstances to deliver us from our sin.

A CONQUERED PEOPLE — “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David.”

Two rulers are introduced—at the time, one was a giant, but his significance was quickly eclipsed by the second. Caesar Augustus must have seemed to his contemporaries as the greatest king ever to rule among men. He spoke, and the entire civilised world was compelled to obey. Peace reigned throughout the Empire during his reign. The doors to the Temple of Janus had been closed for a decade; they would remain closed for an additional thirty years. All foes had been beaten into submission and no one dared disturb the peace of the Empire. Caius Octavius adopted the name Caesar as a courtesy to his great uncle, Julius Caesar. He conferred on himself the title Augustus, taken from the word *augur*, and thus indicating a religious sanction. The republic had been transformed into an empire and he was at the apex of power.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The other ruler to whom we are introduced in this chapter had fists which clenched the fingers of His mother whenever He was unwrapped to nurse. He was dependent upon a teenage girl for cleanliness, for nourishment and for consolation whenever His hot tears flowed. He rested in a bed of straw or hay, tightly wrapped in strips of cloth as was the custom among the poorer people of the insignificant nation into which He was born. His cries attracted only His father and mother at this time, occasioning no attention in the world at large.

Two individuals—one adulated and considered great while the other was insignificant in every way. Yet, the one thought to be great at that time was an unwitting agent of the Living God to accomplish the divine will. The other, unimportant and inconsequential in the eyes of the world, was the Creator, bridging the gulf between heaven and earth to bring the peace of God to all who would receive it. The one had imposed a sort of peace on the Empire through brute force; but the latter was the Prince of Peace who gives to all who will receive Him eternal peace and hope.

Caesar Augustus issued a decree, and his word was law. The Roman world was to be counted for taxation purposes. Jews were exempt from military duty, so we know that this census was for taxation purposes. Jewish custom was that an individual was required to travel to the ancestral home in order to be counted. However, there is so much more here than first meets the eye.

The Apostle to the Gentiles, commenting on this singular event with the advantage of historical perspective, writes: “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” [GALATIANS 4:4, 5]. Paul begins by noting that these events occurred “when the fullness of time had come.” Consider what is obscured through the passage of time by reciting these words.

The world was then at peace so that a census could be conducted. There were very few times in Roman history when the doors to the temple of Janus were closed. This was one of the few times and it was the longest period of peace by far. Roman outposts were situated at the farthest boundaries of the Empire to ensure that Pax Romana would continue. Roman roads had been established throughout the Empire permitting rapid military response to any threat; this had the attendant benefit that people were able to travel unimpeded throughout the Empire. Moreover, the lingua franca of the Empire was Greek, so that from the furthest regions of the Empire to the heart of Rome all subjects spoke a common language. God had worked in human history to bring the world to this point when all things were in place for the advent of His Son.

The two rulers were expressions of two nations—one, powerful, menacing and identified as the dominant power of this fallen world, the other regarded as weak, non-threatening and identified as belonging to an unseen world. Caesar was the epitome of might and power as this world counts strength. The child born in Bethlehem was the epitome of weakness and vulnerability. Yet, the strength which lay in that vulnerable child was greater than anyone could ever imagine.

Joseph Stalin sneered when advised that the Pope requested a promise of restraint by Soviet armies and he mocked, “How many divisions does the Pope have?” His successors later found that the might arising from people of faith was far greater than that of those dependent upon tanks and guns could ever imagine. Might and power were to be revealed through that wee baby boy lying in a manger in a stable in Bethlehem.

So it continues to this day. Two cities vie for the affections of the people of this dying world. One city is that which is of the earth. It is attractive to the man of this earth, promising power and pleasure and promoting possessions as the greatest good. Those identified with this fallen world seek to participate in that world through pushing and struggling to succeed by the criteria held by the world. The other city is the City of God, a city which draws its citizens from among those who have died to self that they may be made alive in Christ the Lord. It is a city in which servants reign and in which the humble are exalted. It is a city in which those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are filled and in which those who seek peace are blessed.

There was more than mere physical preparation for the advent of God's Son. Human hearts were longing for peace. Human hearts were seeking fulfilment. Throughout the Empire a veritable explosion of religions had occurred as hearts sought solace from the burden of daily life. Even among the people of God were those, such as Simeon, who were "waiting for the consolation of Israel" [see LUKE 2:25], and such as Anna who was "waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem" [see LUKE 2:38]. Joseph of Arimathea was also a man "looking for the kingdom of God" [see LUKE 23:50, 51]. There appears to have been a sense of anticipation as human hearts were prepared through their empty way of life for the advent of this One who would be known as the King of kings.

Who would expect a ruler to come from among the Jews? They were a weak and conquered people, who though somewhat factitious, were nevertheless willing to surrender their sovereignty for peace. They were despised, even by their neighbours. Many among the Jewish people had become thoroughly identified with their former rulers, the Greeks. Though not everyone was sympathetic with Grecian ideas or Hellenistic ideals, the nation as a whole had been thoroughly compromised so that it was difficult, if not impossible, to imagine that greatness could reside among them.

A DISGRACED FAMILY — "Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child." Separated in time from the events of that historic birth, it is easy to forget the humility which marked the birth of the Son of God.

Ours is a world that has adopted a casual view of marriage. Politicians manipulate the definition of marriage and entertainers promote the idea that single moms are not handicapped when raising children; and we wonder why youth are increasingly confused about morality. We teach our children how to have safe sex, ensuring that they have ready access to condoms and other means of birth control, and then we marvel at the spectacle of babies having babies. Abortion has become the moral eraser of this day, wielded as the means to assure guilt-free sex; yet women continue to suffer excruciating anguish over the death of their children. All the linguistic Terpsichore cannot change the fact that a foetus is a baby, and mothers who are coerced into ridding themselves of the product of conception discover that truth to their horror only too late.

Mary was a teenage girl when she was betrothed to Joseph. Girls were pledged to be married when they were between twelve and fourteen years of age. Perhaps no more than twelve years of age, this young girl was called upon to bear the Son of God. Earlier, in this same Gospel, we read of the angel's annunciation to Mary, revealing God's will. Perhaps we would benefit from reading again the familiar account Luke provides.

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’

“And Mary said to the angel, ‘How will this be, since I am a virgin?’

“And the angel answered her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.’ And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed from her” [LUKE 1:26-38].

The impact of the words is obscured by their very familiarity to us. Mary was being called to expose herself to rejection and ridicule. Immorality was grounds for a death sentence under the Law of Moses, the Law under which ancient Palestine conducted daily life. At the very least, she would be ostracised and excluded from polite company. The child she would bear would ever after be identified as a bastard.

Joseph, her intended husband, understood the significance of her condition. We need to read again the familiar words of Matthew’s Gospel. “Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly” [MATTHEW 1:18, 19].

How it must have stung whenever the Jewish leaders flung in Jesus’ face their sneering remark, “We are not born of sexual immorality” [JOHN 8:41]. Throughout His days in the flesh He lived under the opprobrium of an illegitimate birth. Mary was called to endure the ignominy of being identified as a woman who bore a child out of wedlock. True, she did not have to wear a scarlet letter, but she did have to endure the knowing glances, the sly comments and the common knowledge that she was an unmarried woman with child.

Joseph, also, bore the shame of a man marrying a woman with a child not his own. It was through divine intervention that he was able to accept this, though I doubt not that the disgrace heaped upon him by a thoughtless society was nevertheless painful. You will no doubt recall that “an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel.’

(which means, God with us).” Manly Joseph “did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus” [MATTHEW 1:20-25].

How would you have written the Christmas story? Would you have the Son of God being born in disgrace? Would you choose a teenage girl to bear Him into the world? Would you risk everything on inexperienced and disgraced children such as Mary and Joseph to ensure that the Son of God would be cared for and protected? Nevertheless, it pleased God to choose an ignoble entrance for His Son into the world—an entrance which made Him vulnerable and which appears risky to us.

Perhaps there is more in Mary’s words than we imagine. Responding to the angel, Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” [LUKE 1:38]. Perhaps we have allowed ourselves to become so focused on how this world operates that we have forgotten that God chooses that which is weak, that which is low and that which is despised. He does this “so that no human being might boast in the presence of God” [see 1 CORINTHIANS 1:27-29].

Thus we have two individuals marching under Caesar’s orders. Though Joseph is of David’s royal lineage, he is not exempt from registering. Joseph is required to go up to his ancestral city to be registered; like the entire nation, he must be taxed. Compelled by events to travel the ninety odd miles in order to register, the young girl who is betrothed to him accompanies him. And this teenage girl carries in her womb the Son of God. Think of that! Her womb has become the tabernacle in which the Son of God prepares to present Himself as the sacrifice for the sin of all mankind!

A SHEEPCOTE — “Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”

If we could somehow look down to see matters as God sees them, how different they would look! The man and woman journeying to be enrolled are not pawns in some Machiavellian play; they are divinely guided to a destiny with grace. They are going up to Bethlehem because of the edict issued by Caesar Augustus—an edict which touched everyone and exempted no one. However, in my Bible I find a prophecy written at least six hundred fifty years before this great event.

Long years before the Son of God was born, the Prophet Micah foretold His birth.

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
 who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
 from you shall come forth for me
 one who is to be ruler in Israel,
 whose coming forth is from of old,
 from ancient days.”

[MICAH 5:2]

Perhaps some today might question whether a prophecy such as this is sufficiently specific to identify the place of the birth of the Son of God. Read the account of the visit of the Magi to the Child which was born to discover that this was the ancient understanding of that text.

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

“‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.’””

[MATTHEW 2:1-6]

Reading this prophecy, I realise that the One who is to be born is not the insignificant one; the insignificant one is Caesar Augustus. It is Caesar who is the puppet, acting in ignorance to ensure that the prophecy of God is fulfilled. The prophecy spoke of the child as being “great to the ends of the earth” [see MICAH 5:4]. This is hegemony. Caesar August thought he had gained it, but he never had. This child, however, achieves hegemony by divine decree.

In Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary entered a city filled with pilgrims arriving to be registered. The town was full. They found no room in the inn, so the child was born in a sheepcote, likely a cave redolent with the stench of dung from generations of sheep. Again, the Son of God bypassed palaces and castles to be born in the most humble circumstances imaginable.

However, permit me to correct one misperception—there is no harsh innkeeper. This individual does not exist. The weary travellers did not seek to stay in an inn as we envision an inn. There are two words commonly translated “inn” in the Koine Greek of the New Testament. One of those words is the Greek word *pandoxeïon* [see LUKE 10:34]. This would be a place with a host, with apartments and provisions. It may interest you to discover that this is not the word used in our account, however.

The word which Doctor Luke employs is *katalúma*, which is no more than a caravanserai, a mere enclosure where livestock could be driven for the night. Perhaps there were rooms for herdsmen watching their animals, but there was no provision for food. There would be water, but there would have been no host, no food, no entertainment. In short, it was neither an inn nor a hostel; rather, it was but a cattle pen. For the sake of accuracy, I am compelled to disabuse you of the thought of a heartless innkeeper. Also, there is no hint of Joseph and Mary’s poverty as the reason they were unable to obtain lodging. Luke is careful to stress that it was a matter of demand occasioned by the influx of travellers compelled by imperial edict to attend to the business of the Empire. What *is* important is that there was no room for Mary to bear her child because of the influx of people into the city to care for the business of the empire.

While in Bethlehem, her time to deliver the child she carried arrived. How simply does the Word of God record the event! Doctor Luke simply states of Mary, “She gave birth to her firstborn son.” Since the child was laid in a manger, we might logically infer that He was born in an out building, a shed or some such rude structure. However, such an assumption is likely off the mark. It is most likely that Jesus was born in a cave that was used to shelter sheep. In the area nearby Bethlehem are found many caves that for centuries have been used as shelters for the sheep that are raised in the region. The caves would have provided rude shelter for the travellers; and with clean straw strewn on the floor there would be a place to rest. It is a logical assumption that Joseph took Mary to one of these caves where the Son of God would be born.

Without midwife, without physician or nurse, scared and assisted only by her terrified husband, Mary delivered her firstborn. When Doctor Luke speaks of this child as “her firstborn,” he tells us much more than we might imagine. Jesus is called firstborn to indicate that Mary had other children later [cf. MATTHEW 12:46, 47; LUKE 8:19, 20]. An attempt to make these other children cousins or to ignore them as though they don’t matter does disservice to the divine record. Certainly, Luke’s words in the biblical record indicate that Jesus was her eldest child, the first of her children.

The noted expositor, G. Campbell Morgan, cogently observes of Luke’s use of the word “firstborn,” “Firstborn does not mean only first in time; it means also first in place, first in order, first in importance. In the New Testament He is called ‘Firstborn of creation.’ He is called ‘Firstborn from the dead.’ He is called ‘Firstborn among many brethren.’ And there is yet a profounder note. Who is this child? The Son of God. That is what happened in that manger. There in that little town of Bethlehem Ephrathah, the Son of God in human form had entered the stream of human history.”²

A MANGER — Mary “gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” Earlier, I noted that the biblical record provides no account of a hard-hearted innkeeper. Now I must destroy yet another Christmas myth. There is no mention of animals. Yes, the child was laid out in a feed trough, but there is no mention of animals attending the birth of the Son of God.

When the baby was born, His mother “wrapped Him in swaddling cloths.” Swaddling cloths were strips of cloth tightly bound around the child. The purpose of swaddling was to restrict the child’s movement. This would be one of the identifying marks for those coming to worship as result of the angelic announcement [see LUKE 2:12].

The birth of Jesus, the Messiah, is a paradox. Born in a shelter normally reserved for stabling animals, He was laid in a manger. The event was insignificant at the time, as two young people compelled by the might of the Roman Empire travelled to Bethlehem where He was born. It was all a matter of chance, wasn’t it? It was only a matter of chance that the Emperor decreed the census at just this time, wasn’t it? It was only a matter of chance that Mary, feeling ostracised and excluded would make this particular journey with her intended husband, wasn’t it? Though his family had the right heritage—pious Davidic parents—a stable was Messiah’s first throne room. What I would have you remember, again, are the humble beginnings of the Messiah. From just such humble beginnings will emerge “the sunrise ... from on high” [LUKE 1:78].

² G. Campbell Morgan, **The Gospel According to Luke** (Revell, Old Tappen NJ 1931) 36

APPLICATIONS FOR ADVENT — There are significant truths which must be stressed if we will benefit fully from the knowledge of how God introduced His Son into the world. I recommend writing these thoughts on your bulletin so you will be able to review the message later. Alternatively, you may wish to jot a note in the margin of your Bible near the text. That way you will be able to think about these truths each time you are reading of the Saviour's Advent. In any case, I urge you to take note of the following points for emphasis.

First, we need to know that ***because God chose humble means to introduce His Son into the world, the most humble among us can find a welcome with Him.*** Underscore that thought in your mind: ***Because God chose humble means to introduce His Son into the world, we can be confident that the most humble among us can find a welcome with Him.*** How often have I presented Christ to an individual only to have that person refuse to commit himself or herself to the Saviour because the individual felt himself or herself to live in circumstances which were too humble to be accepted! They feared that church was no place for someone of such humble means. They feared that they would be looked down upon by the good people of the church. Perhaps they were exhibiting a perverted sense of pride; but I know that many were genuine in believing that they would be unacceptable to members of the church.

Christ knows what it is to live humbly because of His humble beginnings and the humility of His life. Do you remember Paul's description of the Saviour's attitude? "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" [**PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8**]. Because of His humility, we are confident that He is willing to receive anyone.

On one occasion the Master was approached by an individual who averred, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus' reply to this man is at once telling and touching. "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" [**LUKE 9:58**].

God pity the church which has grown so ostentatious or which has become so self-centred that it fails to receive with gladness those whom the Saviour loves and to whom He reaches out. Should any such pompous individuals reside among us, may God deflate her, reminding each of us of our own humble origins. As followers of the Christ, we do well to remember the admonition delivered by James, the brother of our Lord. "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court" [**JAMES 2:1-6**]?

Another truth to remember is that ***Because God chose not to shield His Son from grief and sorrow, He knows our deepest hurts and will give us relief in time of trial.*** This second truth should serve to comfort and encourage each of us at this Christmastide. Our Master, the Saviour of all who believe, experienced ostracism and rejection. His rejection began even before His birth as His mother was ostracised. Then, Jesus Himself was ridiculed and marginalised by polite society. I need to know that He understands my fears, that He understands my hurt, that He understands my sorrow. Even should I be rejected by those whom I love, Christ the Lord will accept me. The Psalmist has said,

“Even if my father and mother abandon me,
the Lord cares for me.”

[PSALM 27:10]³

Knowing this, we have greater understanding of the encouraging word that says, “We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” [HEBREWS 4:15, 16].

Long years before He was born of a virgin, the Spirit of God said of the Son:

“Who has believed what he has heard from us?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by men;
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

“Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.”

[ISAIAH 53:1-6]

³ **The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Bible** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2009)

What a description of the Saviour of mankind! How unlike anything we might have imagined! Possessing neither beauty nor majesty, He was unattractive and undesirable in the eyes of those who actually saw Him. The Son of God was despised and rejected ... we esteemed Him not. The songwriter has written truthfully:

“Man of Sorrows!” what a name
For the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim!
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!⁴

There is great encouragement for all who seek mercy and grace in time of need. The Divine Author has spoken, “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” [HEBREWS 4:14-16]. The Saviour of whom we testify and to whom we point will receive you, giving you life and the forgiveness of sin.

Take note of a final, vital truth to take away from the message. ***Because God prophesied in such minute detail the coming of His Son, we can be confident that He is who He claims to be and assured that He will save all who believe, just as He promises.*** Peter, with benefit of hindsight, writes, “[You know] that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” [1 PETER 1:18-21].

Jesus—born of a virgin, as Isaiah had prophesied, iterated by Jeremiah’s prophecy and by the promise of the Creator confronting our first parents in the Garden of Eden. Jesus—born in Bethlehem, just as Micah writing by inspiration of the Spirit of God had promised. Jesus—born to provide a sacrifice for all mankind, as all the prophets agree. This is the message of Christmas to this day. To all who will receive Him, this Jesus is the Saviour of all who will receive Him.

Impelled by the Spirit of God, the Apostle has presented the offer of life. He writes, “Say the welcoming word to God—‘Jesus is my Master’—embracing, body and soul, God’s work of doing in us what he did in raising Jesus from the dead. That’s it. You’re not ‘doing’ anything; you’re simply calling out to God, trusting him to do it for you. That’s salvation. With your whole being you embrace God setting things right, and then you say it, right out loud: “God has set everything right between him and me!”

“Scripture reassures us, ‘No one who trusts God like this—heart and soul—will ever regret it.’ It’s exactly the same no matter what a person’s religious background may be: the same God for all of us, acting the same incredibly generous way to everyone who calls out for help. ‘Everyone who calls, “Help, God!” gets help’” [ROMANS 10:9-13]⁵.

⁴ Philip P. Bliss, “Hallelujah! What a Saviour!”

⁵ Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2005)

Our invitation to you during this Christmas season is to receive the gift of life which is in Christ Jesus as Lord. To all who will humbly receive Him, come and welcome a thousand times over. To all who think themselves poor and unable to contribute, come receive the rich gifts which the Father longs to lavish on all who look to His Son. To all who hurt, come that He may give you peace and restore your soul. To all who long for life, come that you may live together with Him. To all who will honour Him, come worship this Christ the Son of God. Come, knowing that He will receive you. Amen.