

## **"Ready or Not..."**

### Introduction-

We begin our Christmas Series this year and as always I am excited about it. This series is about the Promised One. The promised.....one.

In the Bible almost from the very beginning, God reveals to us that although we sinned...He had a plan to save us. He promised to send someone who would fix our sin problem and restore our relationship with God.

He gave clues throughout the Old Testament....Key truths that would help them identify the coming Messiah. Today we call them prophecies. God wanted to make sure that the world knew the Messiah when He arrived.

In this series, we are going to identify 20 prophecies....Twenty clues if you will....Twenty truths about the coming Messiah...Twenty truths that only one man could meet.

Think about that for a moment. When Jesus was born, he was just another baby born to no one parents in a no where place. Probably tens of thousands shared his birthday that day....nothing special here.

Yes the events surrounding his birth were spectacular and supernatural. But it was the prophecies that set this man apart. The prophecies that pointed to one birth and one birth only...a birth unique among them all.

The Messiah was the Promised One. If you believe that the Bible is God's Word directly given to us....then Jesus is the Messiah. No one else, ever born, back then or now.....could fulfill the clues...the prophecies given thousands of years before.

Many try to accept Jesus without accepting that the Bible is God's Truth fully revealed to us. Written by God...every word true....both when it was written and now.

So we will be looking at these prophecies that point to the Promised One....Jesus. But before we do that, I want to make sure that we understand something else about the Christmas Story.

God not only ordained one man...one God man...One Messiah...one Promised One....but He also arranged the world to be in a very unique cultural, historical and social place. He prepared the world...for this incredible delivery....We are going to look at the world that Jesus entered that first Christmas....because it will help us to understand what Jesus was really up against.

Galatians 4:4–5 (ESV) 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

The fullness of time....An image of time...ready to bust forth....as if one second longer would be too late....From the moment Adam sinned, this day...this moment has been ordained by God. It is His plan...His timing...and His salvation coming to earth...when He decides...in the fullness of time.

But what made the times full? What was going on in the world that Jesus...God...would step into? Why must Jesus come now and not some other time? Why did God decide that this was the perfect moment...of all the moments in human history.

It is human history you know....at least that is what Christians believe...this was not some fanciful fairy tale....not a made up story....not some legend passed down from generation to generation with embellishments along the way.

What distinguishes Christianity from every other religion is our belief that there was a moment in human history.....when God Himself became a man...fully human....fully God....He stepped into His creation...in order to show us how to live....to show us God...and to save us from the consequences of our rebellion against God. God becoming man is called the Incarnation.

The reality is that as you sit here this Christmas 2021 you either believe this moment really happened or you don't. No middle ground here. In fact, Luke...one of the authors who documents an eye witness account of these moments...wanted to make sure that you and all who read about Jesus would know that these are real events that happened to real people in real time.

Look at Luke's introduction to his first book...cleverly called Luke which is the first of two...the latter called Acts.

Luke 1:1–4 (ESV) 1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Luke is writing to Theophilus...and he tells him...i want you to be certain of the things you have been taught. I am going to give you details....historical anchors...that you can trust. What you have been taught really happened...

As you might expect by now....since this is the most important moment in all of human history...we must look at it in the historical context....this event occurred in a very Jewish context and requires an understanding of the Roman world at the time of His birth.

It is in the Jewish and Roman context of the times that we begin to better understand this moment in history. It is when we better understand the context that we begin to understand why the time was full....why this was the moment for Jesus to enter human history.

The Biblical record and the American Christmas story are not very similar. We have Westernized this story over the years. Making it look the way that makes us feel more comfortable.

Luke 2:1–5 (ESV) 1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

Luke immediately shows us one of these historical anchors. This is not “once upon a time.” These are not fanciful stories of Zeus and Apollo on Mount Olympus. This event occurred in a time and place that you can double check. The time was in Caesar Augustus' census...do you remember when we all went home...Theophilus? Remember that census? Well that is when this happened.

The opening words of this famous section of Scripture provide the setting for this, the greatest of all stories, by informing us that Caesar Augustus (Octavian) was ruler of “the entire Roman world”—“all the inhabited earth”

In those days.....which days? Well Luke has just told us about the miraculous birth of John the Baptist. He tells us....

Luke 1:80 (ESV) 80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

Luke tells us that in or around the time of the Birth of John the Baptist....2-3 months before Jesus would be born a decree went out from the King.

We are told by Luke that the Emperor Caesar Augustus mandated this census. Who is Caesar Augustus?

He was born with the name Octavian, named after his father. His grandmother was the sister of Julius Caesar, and being a talented young man, Octavian came to the attention of his great uncle. Julius Caesar eventually adopted Octavian as his son, and he was made his official heir in 45 b.c.

Octavian was the adopted son of the King. But within a year....Julius Caesar would die....Mark Anthony would stab him on the Ides of March March 15th in 44 BC. "Et tu Brute" Do you know what the Ides of March is? It is the annual day in Rome when the Taxes for each person must be paid. It is our April 15th.

So when Julius Caesar died he left the kingdom to his three boys...Octavian, Mark Anthony and Lepidus. They fought constantly for power and the whole Roman empire was a bloody internal war

It finally came to a head in 31 BC when Octavian defeated Mark Anthony and the armies his wife Cleopatra brought from Egypt.....Octavius became the emperor of all of Rome and took the name.....Caesar Augustus. **PHOTO 1**

So in those days while John the Baptist was being born and Mary was carrying Jesus....the Roman empire was trying to recover from years and years of a very destructive civil war.

The **world** Augustus lived in and Jesus would be born into was wrecked by war, destruction, brutality, and immorality. They were worn out with twenty years of civil war. Its farms had been neglected, its towns had been sacked or besieged, much of its wealth had been stolen or destroyed. Administration and protection had broken down; robbers made every street unsafe at night; highwaymen roamed the roads, kidnapped travelers, and sold them into slavery. Trade diminished, investment stood still, interest rates soared, property values fell.

Rome was full of men who had lost their economic footing and then their moral stability: soldiers who had tasted adventure and had learned to kill; citizens who had seen their savings consumed in the taxes and inflation of war and waited and hoped for some returning tide to life them back to affluence; women dizzy with freedom, multiplying divorces, abortions, and adultery.

Rome was much like the American South immediately following the Civil War. But about thirty years before Jesus was born...Caesar Augustus had started bringing order to chaos.

It was said of him that he came to a Rome made of brick and left it a city of marble. He transformed not just Rome but the entire known world with his roads and his armies.

He brought three things that turned the tide miraculously. First, he brought peace because he had defeated all his rivals. Second, he brought political and administrative skill, perhaps even brilliance. Third, he brought vast sums of money from Egypt to pay the soldiers and to help the Roman economy.

The internal peace and order which Augustus achieved endured, with occasional interruptions, for about two centuries. Never before had all the shores of the Mediterranean been under one rule and never had they enjoyed such prosperity. He would start the seeds of what would be known as *pax Romana* "the peace of Rome" which enhanced the spread of ideas and religions over the entire known empire.

But as great a man as **Caesar Augustus** was, he was only a man. And the man who brought the answers also took a dear price. He demanded absolute power over the Roman Empire. For hundreds and hundreds of years, Rome prided itself on being a *republic*—a nation governed by laws, not by any man. The idea that no man was above the law, and the Roman Senate and the army and various political leaders lived together in a sometimes difficult arrangement

Now, Octavius would change all that. In 27 b.c. he arranged for the Roman Senate to give him the title *Augustus*, which means "exalted" and "sacred." Now Rome wasn't a *republic*, governed by laws; it was an *empire* governed by an *emperor*. The first Emperor of Rome was this same **Caesar Augustus**.

The title **Augustus**: Previous to this moment, the word had been applied only to holy objects and places, and to certain gods; applied to Octavian it clothed him with a halo of sanctity, and the protection of religion and the gods. Make no mistake about it....Caesar Augustus declared himself as god and got the Roman Senate to agree. Rome had their god....their savior...and his name was Caesar Augustus.

In fact, at about the same time Luke was writing these words, some of the Greek cities in Asia Minor adopted Caesar's birthday, September 23, as the first day of the New Year, hailing him as "savior." An inscription at the birthplace of the famous Herodotus even called him "savior of the whole world."

The Myrian inscription: "Divine Augustus Caesar, son of a god, imperator of land and sea, the benefactor and savior of the whole world...." Indeed, the name "Augustus" itself identified him as possessing divine characteristics, if not actually divine.

The seeds that would destroy the Roman Empire had been planted. The man who declared himself as God....was setting up the arrival of the man who really was God. A spiritual battle was about to be launched....**PHOTO 2**

Historian John Buchan records that when Caesar Augustus died, men actually "comforted themselves, reflecting that Augustus was a god, and that gods do not die." So the world had at its helm a self-

proclaimed, widely accepted god and savior. Luke, the historian and theologian, wants us to see this as the backdrop for understanding the coming of the real Savior. The contrast could not be greater.

Caesar Augustus had brought peace to the Roman Empire.....But Rome and Augustus had bludgeoned every foe into submission. There was "peace," but it was a dark peace—a Hitler's peace—and no man or woman or boy or girl could say a word against it without fearfully looking over their shoulder.

Augustus and his successors had not solved the basic problems of the Mediterranean world. They had obscured them. For what appeared to be a failure in government they had substituted more government, and government was not the answer. Like every human institution that rejects God....it is just a matter of time...until that nation...that empire falls.

Once social and political situations get bad enough...people will dismiss the democracy and appoint a sovereign leader to solve problems....It happened to Rome with Augustus...It happened to Germany with Hitler...To Russia with Stalin....It will in my opinion, happen one day is the US.

So in the midst of all of this....Augustus Caesar mandated that every person in the empire...be counted.

The business of census-taking grew out of attempts to regularize the collection of taxes, especially the poll or head tax in the Roman provinces. In other locales it might also be the precursor to military conscription, but, since the Jewish people were exempt from military service, this would not have been the case in Palestine

Why did Augustus take a census now? It was not just to know how many people were in the Roman Empire....A census at that time brought out two things....each person had to declare themselves a part of the empire....and a price must be paid for each person....The census was all about loyalty and money. Caesar needed to know who was loyal to him and who was not.

Note the foreshadowing here....This earthly king....who had declared himself as a god....issued a mandate that every one be counted...that they declare their place in the kingdom and that they paid a price for that privilege. If not...the Romans would kill them as traitors.

According to Leon Morris, Justin Martyr, writing in the middle of the second century, said that in his own day (more than a hundred years after the time of Jesus) you could look up the record of the same **census** Luke mentioned. These are historical moments documented by many historical sources.

I teach often about events in the Bible are foreshadowing of future events....how there are threads that connect the Bible from beginning to end.

In Genesis....Man was being threatened by Satan who had declared himself to be God. Man sinned and God came to the Garden to establish his redemptive plan.

Now Augustus Caesar has declared himself to be God and is misleading God's people.....God came to the manger to begin the redemptive plan.

In the future...God tells us in the book of Revelation...the Antichrist will declare himself to be God and God will return again to finish the redemptive plan started in Genesis.

The story of the Bible....God's story is about God arranging the events of human history to rescue man and reestablish our relationship with Him. These historical anchors also help set the context for this very familiar story of Christmas.

**Luke 2:2 (ESV) 2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria.**

This is another historical anchor, securing Luke's account with the reign of known, verifiable historical people. Quirinius was a real dude. Historical evidence validates that he served as Governor of Syria twice in his life.

Immediately before the birth of Christ, Quirinius was appointed Governor of Syria which included Judea and Samaria, and he was given instructions to assess the Judean Province for taxation purposes. One of his first duties was to carry out a census as part of this order.

The Jews already hated their pagan conquerors, and censuses were forbidden under Jewish law. The assessment was greatly resented by the Jews, and open revolt was prevented only by the efforts of the high priest Joazar. Josephus the Jewish historian tells us that it is this census that triggered the revolt of Judas of Galilee and the formation of the party of the Zealots, according to Josephus. They wanted to overthrow Rome by force....they were essentially terrorists...and one would become a disciple of Jesus names Simon the Zealot. Quirinius served as governor of Syria with nominal authority over Syria, Judea and Samaria until 12 AD.

Real people....real events....human history.

Think about the power Caesar Augustus must have felt.....It is an impressive thought; one man, in the ivory palaces of Rome, gave a command—and the whole world responded. It may well be that up to that point there had never been a man with power over more lives than Caesar Augustus.

But like most every man of such ambition and authority, he thought a lot of himself. It is easy to imagine how invincible he felt when he made a *decree ... that all the world should be registered* for taxation. "I make the command and the whole Roman world has to obey it."

As he sat in his palace and made his decree, he thought it was the supreme exercise of his will, the ultimate flexing of his muscle. But he was just a tool in God's hand. God had promised that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), and that promised would be fulfilled. God had said in Genesis that Eve's descendents would one day bring a Savior....In Revelation 12 God tells us through John that this Savior would be born to a woman and Satan would try to destroy Him.

All of these moments....are under the watchful eye and careful hand of God. So how does one get a young couple from Nazareth down to Bethlehem when they might not be inclined to travel? Simple. Just work through the *political* "savior of the world," and use him as a pawn in your plan.

We also see that Augustus, for all his accomplishments, couldn't really be the answer. God allowed Caesar Augustus to rise to unheard of human power for many reasons; in some ways, he was like a Roman John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus. At the end of the story, what is important is Jesus. Who does the world know more today?—No one is celebrating the birth of Caesar Augustus....

Luke 2:3–5 (ESV) 3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 4 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, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

There is no record in secular history that Augustus decreed this census and commanded it be performed in this manner, but it was consistent with what we do know of him from history. Augustus was known to be very sensitive to the nationalistic feelings of his subjects, and so he commanded them to return to their cities of family origin for the census.

We do have evidence that when the Romans decided to do a census in Egypt that they did so by sending everyone to their home towns. Country roads took them home to the place where they belonged...but they felt it lessened the blow of having to pay taxes by at least being able to see your family and remember your routes.

Seen through everyday logic, Joseph and Mary were insignificant nobodies from a nothing town. They were peasants. They were poor, un-educated, of no account. And we will see they are outcasts. But she understood who she was and who God was. Joseph and Mary capsulized the mystery of grace—the King does not come to the proud and powerful but to the poor and powerless. As it is so often in life, things were not as they seemed to the world around, because humble Mary and Joseph were the adoptive father and birth mother of the King of kings

I want you to think about what a praise report this must have been for Joseph and Mary. They were Jewish people who were aware of the Scriptures regarding the Promised One.

I can almost guarantee you that once the Angel made the announcement to Mary that they spent night after night ready about the Messiah and the promises of Isaiah Micah and others....because that Messiah would soon be their son.

So imagine them asking each other about the prophecy in Micah.

Micah 5:2–5 (ESV) 2 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. 3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. 4 And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. 5 And he shall be their peace.

Imagine Mary reading the words of the old prophet...seeing him say "until the time she who is in labor" and realizing that the prophet was talking about her...Mary...incredible.

They knew....most everybody knew...the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. But they lived in Nazareth. They had no plans to go to Bethlehem....there were no feasts coming up in Jerusalem.....Bethlehem is only a few miles away from the Temple. Joseph and Mary must have been perplexed....becoming more and more concerned as the pregnancy as they began the last trimester.....until they heard the wonderful news. Caesar Augustus had demanded that everyone stop what they are doing and go to their home town....Now. At least two people knew that decree didn't really come from Caesar Augustus....The fullness of time had come.....God was working out His plan....He had the power to make Augustus...this human little g false god...do what the One True God had commanded.

And now the poor couple's forced journey to Bethlehem to pay taxes would set the stage for the fulfillment of that messianic prophecy. They appeared to be helpless pawns caught in the movements of secular history, but every move was under the hand of Almighty God. The Messiah would indeed be born in tiny, insignificant Bethlehem! As Mary traveled, her steady beating heart, hidden from the world, was keeping time with the heart beat of God.

As often in biblical narrative, then, we find here a conjunction of intentions. On one level, Joseph's journey is the consequence of the almighty decree of Augustus. On another, even the universal rule of Augustus is conceived as subordinate to another purpose, the aim of God. One may call this ironic, as if Rome is made unwittingly to serve a still greater Sovereign. But it is also prophetic, for it reveals the provisional nature of even Roman rule.

The baby Mary carried was not a Caesar, a man who would become a god, but a far greater wonder—the true God who had become a man!

**Luke 2:6 (ESV) 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.**

The trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem (just outside of Jerusalem) is about 80 miles. This was not a short distance in those days. It was a significant undertaking, costing time and money.

According to the Roman law, Mary didn't have to go with Joseph for the tax census; but it made sense for her to go with Joseph, especially because she was in the latter stages of a controversial pregnancy

We often think that Mary was close to delivery when they made this journey, but this was most likely not have been the case at all. Joseph may have been anxious to get her out of Nazareth to avoid the pressure of scandal. Remember that for the first six months of this pregnancy, Mary had left her home town and was with Elizabeth. Now as John the Baptist is being born she returns home and is showing. It is likely that Joseph got her out of town to protect both of them.

Explain if you want the options that Joseph had....

A girl who became pregnant out of wedlock would have been terrified. The whole social structure was set up for children to be born within marriage. Genealogy and ownership of children was seen as very important. Girls who became pregnant outside marriage would probably have had to leave their homes and their families.

There was the potential of being sold into slavery or of being stoned to death. She may have been married off quickly or banished from her home and village, which may have led a women to prostitution or slavery when she had no way of supporting herself. According to the New Testament Joseph, after being visited by an angel, decided not to send her away or to expose her but to marry her.

We often don't talk about this, but once Joseph decided to keep her as his bride...He was making the public proclamation that he was the father of her baby. Even though both of them were innocent....the world saw them as guilty...another critical feature of God's plan.

Joseph and Mary were seen as sinners....It was obvious to this very strict Jewish society that this couple had sinned. Their punishment was death....He was considered a rapist and she was considered a whore. No upstanding family or community would accept these sinners into their home or community. They were likely rejected b their family and their communities.



When Mary left Elizabeth she headed home....but it is unlikely that she was able to stay there long. It is more likely that they left very soon after that to go to Bethlehem because they knew the census was coming.....

The people of Nazareth would later try to throw Jesus off a cliff because He offended them. It is possible that Joseph and Mary was not safe there. No one there believed this was a legitimate child.

From the moment Jesus was in the womb...the world was against Him. They likely fled to Bethlehem because of the upcoming census and their awareness of prophecy....but they were most likely not any more welcome there.

So it is likely that Mary was more like 6 or 7 months pregnant when they made their way to Bethlehem....very unlikely that she arrived on the night of her birth....even though it makes for a great western story.

While I am busting your image of Christmas...she likely did not travel on a donkey...only rich people had donkeys...they were dirt poor. You would think someone would let her ride on a donkey but they were total social outcasts.....

So Luke tells us....While they were there....the time came for her to give birth

Luke 2:6–7 (ESV) 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 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.

With simplicity and economy of language, Luke records the miraculous The simplicity of his description....Luke who describes everything....seems to have no words...She gave birth to her firstborn.....huge statement....very understated.

Instead...Luke's description focuses on a few details not seen in the other accounts in the Gospels...He notes that this is Mary's firstborn son...he speaks of the guest room.

We must once again deal with the way this story has become Westernized over the years.

The term Luke employs here for "*guest room*" is often translated in English as "inn." If Luke was speaking of a commercial inn...there is a completely different word for that which he did not use. In addition, It is doubtful whether a commercial inn actually existed in Bethlehem, which stood on no major roads and was so close to Jerusalem- a larger city. The term that we call "inn" is best translated as "guest room"

Luke says that there was no room for them in the guest room....or inn.

This never made sense to me.....My mother would kill me if I didn't give up my seat for a woman....must be a pregnant woman....Can you imagine a pregnant woman....obviously about to deliver a baby....and not one Jewish man....men who pride themselves on hospitality and family....not one gave up their room for her? Really?

It is not that the innkeeper was just a jerk....it seems like everyone in Jerusalem at that time was a jerk. What are we missing?

Normally....Joseph headed home....home to see Mom and Dad...Home to be counted in the census...They likely arrived some time before the baby was born....but they could not find a place to stay? Why?

In peasant homes in the ancient Near East, family and animals slept in one enclosed space, with the animals located on a lower level. Mary and Joseph, then, would have been the guests of family or friends, but there was no room for them.....really? Remember the Jewish Culture....hospitality....hospitality for travelers was everything....family...family was everything....having a child that could be the Messiah....everything....Having a child in the family of David...in Bethlehem...everything....and they got there well ahead of the crowds...probably months.... ..But one thing trumped all of that for a Jewish person....the Law.

In the eyes of the Jews....based on the Law..these two were sinners...They were betrothed....the same as married only without sexual contact.....they had broken the covenant...We all remember the consequences of breaking a covenant. If Joseph sent Mary away she would be an outcast...possibly stoned...and a shunned woman. By keeping her as his wife he too is considered guilty of fornication. The term for them would be Joseph is a fornicator and she is a whore. Most considered this older man who impregnated this young girl before their wedding as a child molestor and rapist. We often talk about the shame of Mary...but Joseph was probably the one most blamed.

That "guest room" is the more plausible meaning here is urged by the realization that in .....Like "No soup for you"....."No room for you" Look at what Isaiah said years before.

Isaiah 1:3 (ESV) 3 The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand."

When Luke tells us that there was no room for them in the guest room....I don't think he was talking about occupancy. I believe that they were not welcome in any upstanding Jewish home....even those of peasants.

They were not to be housed...they were to be shunned....Yes Caesar Augustus had decreed that Joseph had to come home to be counted....but he could not decree that he had to be received by his family when he was there. Remember this is their family. A family reunion is occurring and "they" actually showed up. They weren't just whispering behind their backs....they were clearly vocal. There is no room for YOU here...not at my house...not at your parents house, no one.

Joseph and Mary were homeless, unwanted, and shamed in their home town. I doubt they arrived one night and found the town too full. Mary had been on the run hiding since the moment she was with child. Their family did not receive them...so they were left with the local hostels.

There was definitely no room for this fornicator and whore in the "Guest" room of any respectable Jewish home. The "Inkeeper" often gets the bad rap here, but at least he offered them something.

In Bethlehem the accommodations for travelers were primitive. The eastern inn was the crudest of arrangements. Typically it was a series of stalls built on the inside of an enclosure and opening onto a common yard where the animals were kept. All the innkeeper provided was fodder for the animals and a fire to cook on.

God tells us through Luke that nothing was made available to them, not even one of those crude stalls. And despite the urgency, no one would make room for them. So it was probably in the common courtyard where the travelers' animals were tethered that Mary gave birth to Jesus, with only Joseph attending her. There is no way the women of the town assisted Mary in the birth of Jesus....Think about the irony and symbolism here. Jesus...the Savior...the long awaited Messiah...was being born...in Bethlehem....in the line of David....and everyone missed it because they were focused on the Law.....and their belief that the Messiah could never come to a whore as a bastard child.

Think about how scared they must have been....Mary was probably 13 or 14...Joseph maybe 20. Imagine her pain....their fear...their humiliation...their unjust and untrue judgment....their poverty....their rejection....their innocence....the people's indifference....their loneliness....and their utter helplessness.....

There they are in a stinking barnyard....the lowest of places....for the lowest of people....they came to this place to be counted...only to discover that they don't count.

Their experience will be that of their child...innocent...but judged...rejected....shunned....humiliated...coming to His own to be counted....experiencing their indifference....and realizing that for them....He too doesn't count.

This public judgment never goes away for Jesus....likely throughout his childhood he was called a bastard child....even as an adult the Pharisees try to use this against Him.

John 8:39–41 (ESV) 39 They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, 40 but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. 41 You are doing the works your father did." They said to him, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God."

The Pharisees knew the claim of the incarnation...they rejected it. We have glossed over the stigma of Jesus' birth to first century Jews.

If we imagine with Western glasses that Jesus was born in a freshly swept, county fair stable, we miss the whole point. It was wretched—scandalous! There was sweat and pain and blood and cries as Mary reached up to the heavens for help. The earth was cold and hard. The smell of birth mixed with the stench of manure and acrid straw must have been horrible.

Imagine Mary a 13 year old girl ....a virgin...never has been intimate with any man...and now she is alone with Joseph...just the two of them.....No maidens have come to help her...No women...no family...Just the two of them....inexperienced....afraid....alone...but with enormous faith in God and His promises.

Trembling carpenter's hands, clumsy with fear, grasped God's Son slippery with blood—the baby's limbs waving helplessly as if falling through space—his face grimacing as he gasped in the cold and his cry pierced the night

Notice from the text that it was Mary who wrapped Jesus in swaddling clothes....there was no one else to do that for her.

Mary counted his fingers, and the couple wiped him clean as best they could by firelight. Mary wrapped each of his little arms and legs with strips of cloth—mummy-like. No one helped her. She laid him in a feeding trough.

It was clearly a leap down—as if the Son of God rose from his splendor, stood poised at the rim of the universe...illuminating everything with His Glory.... and dove headlong, speeding through the stars over the Milky Way to earth's galaxy, where he plunged into a huddle of animals to stare into the eyes of two freaked out teenagers. Nothing could be lower. He went from the Highest of palces...to the lowest on earth. A crazy entry for the King of Kings and Prince of Peace.....

No child born into the world that day seemed to have lower prospects. The Son of God was born into the world not as a prince but as a pauper.

Mary and Joseph in many ways foreshadowed the life of their son....

Because of their faith and obedience to God...they too were poor...outcasts.....accused of crimes of which they were innocent....judged ridiculed and rejected by their family....shunned by religious people. Not really welcomed anywhere...homeless...poor....many believe they deserve death....that they deserve the punishment of God....No one believes their claims of innocence....all they have is the promise of God...all they can rely on is their faith in the promise of God...

Their first encounter with Jesus...is much like ours....scared...afraid...unworthy...overwhelmed...and yet.....having faith in the promises of God....that is how we all come to Christ....his birth is a lot like our being reborn in Christ...we offer nothing but surrender...we encounter Jesus...our fears...our failures...become drowned in grace, forgiveness and love....and much like Joseph and Mary....we sit back after it all.....full of God's wonder....asking how can this be?

We must never forget that this is where Christianity began, and where it always begins—with a sense of need, a stark realization of our spiritual need....graced sense of our insufficiency. Christ, himself setting the example, He comes to the needy. He is born only in those who are “poor in spirit.” His life...His entrance in to His creation...set the tone....for the entire mission.

The son of the Most High God...God himself...enters the world umbilically tied to a lowly outcast Jewish girl. She touches His hand...hands that once sculpted mountains....So without even a ripple of notice...God stepped into the warm lake of humanity. Without protocol or pretense....Where you would have expected angels there were only flies....Where you would have expected heads of state...there were only smelly animals....Mary and Joseph would experience this miracle alone....There were angels but they were sent to Shepherds....there was a star but it was sent to Wise Men. This Royal birth went essentially unnoticed...while the world slept. Please don't sleep through Christmas this season....God became a baby....and the world was forever changed.

Let's pray

God there may have been no room for you in the guest room that day....but please God help me to make sure I have room for you in my heart. Your own did not embrace you but please God help me to make sure I do. We confess God that sometimes...particularly this time of year...we too are preoccupied with pomp and pagentry and miss God cooing in a manger. Help us God to understand this Christmas...that divine power is never mediated through human strength....but through our weakness and surrender. That true greatness is not about our rights but rather our release. and the even the

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lowliest of places are holy and sacred when you are in their midst. Help us to keep you the focus during the next week and in all the weeks that follow. In Jesus name...Amen