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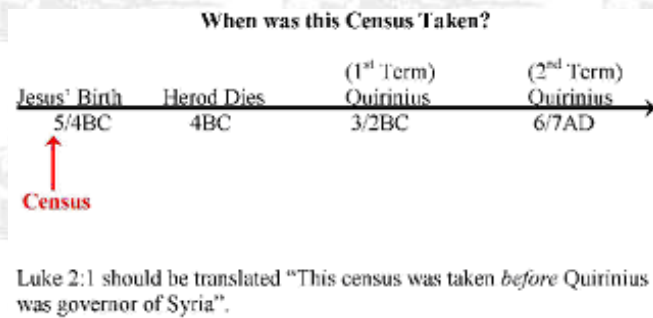
A0652 – December 24, 2006 – Lk 2:1-20 – The Birth Of A Savior

They all were looking for a King
To slay their foes and lift them high:
Thou cam'st, a little baby thing
That made a woman cry.ⁱ

Lk 2:1 Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. Lk 2:2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

The Bible is very concerned about historical fact because it is grounded in history which is God's unfolding plan. **Now in those days**, that is, in the days of John the Baptists birth, **a decree went out from Caesar Augustus** who was Caesar of the Roman Empire from 27BC-14AD. He decreed **that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth**, which refers to the whole Roman Empire.

This included the land of Israel which was under the rule of a great builder and murderer named Herod. Herod was the one in Matt 2 who ordered a mass slaughter of all the babies near Bethlehem when he heard that Jesus was born the King of the Jews. Herod was constantly concerned about being usurped from his throne. This Herod died in 4BC so the census had to take place *before* 4BC. Yet, it was **taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria** and **Quirinius** was not governor of Syria until 3/2BC *after* Herod died. This presents a Bible difficulty. How could the census have taken place during Quirinius governorship if Herod had already died?



Several solutions have been proffered but I think the best one is simply to see that the word **first** (*protos*) can be translated "before" as in Luke 15:18. So, the verse should rather be translated "This census was taken *before* Quirinius was governor of Syria". The **census** probably took place in the year 5BC since Herod died in 4BC and had all the baby boys two years and under murdered in Bethlehem and the vicinity. This would place the date of Christ's birth in 5/4BC.

Lk 2:3 And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. Lk 2:4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, Lk 2:5 in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.

Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth. It's helpful to get a feel for Biblical geography. **Galilee** was the district, **Nazareth** was a city in the district. And they **went up** from there **to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem.** Again, **Judea** is the district and **Bethlehem** is the city in the district. They **went up** because even though Nazareth is on a small mountain Bethlehem is on a higher mountain. For the Jews, directional terms such as "went up" or "went down" do not refer to the points of a compass but to elevation. So, they traveled over 72 miles from the northern city of Nazareth to the southern city of Bethlehem going **up** to Bethlehem. At this point Mary had already received revelation that she would carry the Messiah and Joseph had a dream where it was revealed that Mary was with child by the Holy Spirit and he should name Him Jesus (Matt 1:21). So, Mary was pregnant at the time they traveled to Bethlehem. It appears she was far along in her pregnancy as well, probably between seven and eight months. So, this would have been quite a journey.

The city of Bethlehem is also called the **city of David** because King David was born in this city (1 Sam 17:12, 15) and this is the city the prophet Micah foretold would be the place of Messiah's birth.

Mic 5:2 "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Too* little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity."

This interesting verse teaches that an eternal person would have a human birth in the city of Bethlehem. How an eternal person could have a temporal origin is partially explained by the Doctrine of Kenosis taught by Paul in Phil 2:5-8.

Php 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, **Php 2:6** who, although He existed in the form of God [*morphe* – existence or subsistence but not physical form *per se*], did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, **Php 2:7** but emptied [*kenoo*] Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and being* made in the likeness of men. **Php 2:8** Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

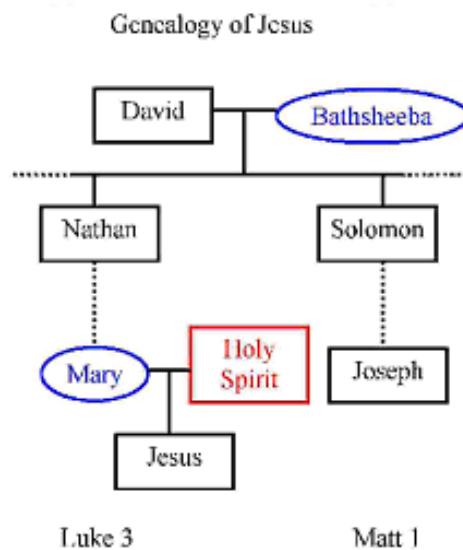
Kenosis comes from the Greek word *kenoo* in verse 7, often translated "emptied". The translation "emptied" is misleading because it makes it sound like He gave up some aspect of His divine nature, something was subtracted from God. For example, sometimes people wrongly say that Christ gave up His divine attributes. However, He did nothing of the sort. Nothing was subtracted but rather something was added. We know this because the emptying is defined by the three participles which follow in vv 7-8.

1. taking the form of a bond-servant
2. being made in the likeness of men
3. being found in appearance as a man

Simply put, the emptying was not a subtraction of deity but the addition of humanity. To His divine nature was added a complete human nature; a human body, human spirit and human soul. The result was the one person Jesus Christ. This had to be since God cannot die. So, for any salvation to

take place He had to add a complete human nature to His divine nature in order to die on the cross for our sins. When He died on the cross it was His humanity that died and not His deity. Thus, the eternal God took to Himself humanity. This unique occurrence took place in the city of Bethlehem.

Returning to Luke 2, at the close of verse 4 it gives the reason Joseph went to Bethlehem. It was **because he was of the house and family of David**. Joseph was a descendant of King David through Solomon according to Matt 1:1-20. Mary was a descendant of King David through Nathan according to Luke 3:23-38.



The Messiah had to be a descendant of David (2 Sam 7:12-16), born of a virgin (Gen 3:15; Isa 7:14) and not a direct descendant of Joseph because of the Coniah Curse of Jer 22:24-30.

Lk 2:5 in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.

They were **engaged** or betrothed at the time. At the time of engagement there was a ceremony binding one to the other and the man gave the woman jewelry. The engagement was so strong it was considered the equivalent of marriage and it was not even considered taboo for the engaged couple to live together.

Lk 2:6 While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. Lk 2:7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and

she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Jesus was her **firstborn son**. She actually had four other sons by Joseph but Jesus was her **first** and only **son** by the Holy Spirit. **and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger**, a manger was a feeding trough for animals. He did not come into the world in the best hospital or in a palace of kings but without dignity in a cave, lowly and placed in a feeding trough. The reason she did this was because **there was no room for them in the inn**. There were many people in Bethlehem registering in the census. God was providentially behind the timing of this census to fulfill the prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem even though His parents lived in Nazareth. So, here they were in a cave where Mary gave birth to a Savior. There are many such caves in the hilly terrain of Bethlehem and its vicinity. Often shepherds would keep their flocks in these caves at night. In the deepest recesses of the cave a mother would occasionally give birth. Archaeologists claim that the cave where Jesus was born is now housed inside the Church of the Nativity which was built in 330AD by Empress Helena. Archaeologists consider this a class one site. No one in the ancient or modern church has doubted that this is the precise cave Jesus was born in.

Lk 2:8 In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. Debate surrounds whether flocks were kept in the fields year round or not. Undoubtedly it was common to keep one's flocks in the fields in the months leading up to Passover beginning as early as February. **Lk 2:9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.** It is significant that the angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds and not to the Temple priesthood or upper class. Shepherds were considered low on the social scale so this announcement to the shepherds indicated that the Savior came for all men, even the lowliest of men. **Lk 2:10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; primarily all the people** are Israel but eventually it would be understood that this also referred to the Gentiles **Lk 2:11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior.** Who can imagine the import of the words **for today!** A Savior was suddenly in the world. It is significant that it does not say He would become a

Savior but that He was born a Savior. He did not become a Savior on the cross. He was a Savior at His birth. He was there, then, in that place as a baby and a Savior. Since only God can save calling this baby a Savior indicates He was God and man. He did not come into the world as a King to crush His enemies but as a baby in a human family needing nourishment from His mother and protection from His father. To identify with us He came into the world the same way you and I came into the world.

And the angel says he is **Christ the Lord**, this appellation is used here and only here. Its meaning is unmistakable. **Christ** is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “Messiah” and **Lord** is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “YHWH”. The Savior who was born was the Messiah-YHWH, the God-man, God in the flesh, the hope of the world. Certainly this is the greatest news and the greatest joy of mankind. For there is salvation in no one else (Acts 4:12).

Ga 4:4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, **Ga 4:5** so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

Lk 2:12 “*This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.*” **Lk 2:13** And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, **Lk 2:14** “**Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.**”

Two signs are given that the one they find is a Savior. His humble wrappings and His lying in a feeding trough. Accompanying this message was a great host of angels praising God at the birth of a Savior **saying “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is well pleased.”** Angels sang at the birth of the universe (Job 38:7) and here they sing at the birth of the Savior. This phrase has become popularized in the KJV, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” But the Greek is not proclaiming peace on earth and good will toward all men. As J. Vernon McGee said,

The angels did not say, “on earth peace, good will toward men.” What they actually said was, “peace to men of good will,” or “peace among

men with whom He is pleased.” The angels did not make the asinine statement that many men make today which goes, “Let’s have peace, peace, peace.” My friend, “There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked” (Isa. 48:22). We live in a day when we need to beat our plowshares into swords—not the other way around. We live in a wicked world. We live in a Satan-dominated world, and therefore there is no peace. There is, however, peace to men of good will. If you are one of those who has come to Christ and taken him as Savior, you can know this peace of God. Romans 5:1 states: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” When Christ came the first time, this is the kind of peace He brought. At His second coming He will come as the Prince of Peace; at that time He will put down unrighteousness and rebellion in the world. He will establish peace on the earth. But until He comes again, there will be no peace on this earth.ⁱⁱ

But to those who have received Him as Savior there is peace for them on earth.

Lk 2:15 When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds *began* saying to one another, “Let us go straight to Bethlehem then for they were in the near vicinity, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.” Would you not go straight away to see such a sight? **Lk 2:16** So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. **Lk 2:17** It must have been exciting for the shepherds to share with them that God had revealed the very presence of the baby Savior and to look upon Him sleeping in a feeding trough all swaddled up. **When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child.** Christianity is not a feeling it’s an objective reality. Once they saw the evidence that corresponded to the two signs they had been given, only then did they spread the news to others. **Lk 2:18** And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. The shepherds became the voice that went forth to proclaim the good news and great joy that a Savior had been born in Bethlehem. **Lk 2:19** But Mary, she kept quiet, she treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. **Lk 2:20** The shepherds went back, glorifying and

praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

This is what Christmas is about. It is about Christ the Lord, Messiah-YHWH and how the eternal Son of God took to Himself a complete human nature to be born into the world of men and provide an eternal redemption. He was born a baby, grew into a boy and a man, dying for us and resurrected to supply an eternal redemption. Christmas is not about the gifts we have packaged in fine wrapping and placed under trees to give to others but about the gift that God has given us, His Son, packaged in a lowly cave in Bethlehem, swaddled in 1st century cloths and laid in a feeding trough only to be exalted in time by His God and Father in heaven who made us for Himself and provided a way back to Him through His Son. For God so loved the world that He gave His unique Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). Let us pray.

ⁱ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:253). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

ⁱⁱ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:253). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

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