

# The Real Christmas Story: Christ Over Caesar (Luke 2:1-20)

## Four reasons why God is to be trusted and honored above Caesar:

- 1. God is in ultimate authority, not Caesar (v.1-5)**
  - Luke begins his account of the birth of our Lord with “in those days,” which demonstrates the historicity of this account. Luke gives historical data by providing specific names of specific rulers (Caesar Augustus and Quirinius). It is not “once upon a time” but “in those days.”
  - Caesar Augustus (Octavian):
    - Born in 63 BC, he was the son of Julius Caesar’s nephew and ascended to power after defeating Antony and Cleopatra at Actium in 31AD. He reigned until 14 AD and was granted the title “Augustus,” which means “majestic” or “holy,” in 27AD by the Roman senate.
    - He was the first emperor to encourage a cult to deify his name and origin. According to legend, like Alexander the Great, Augustus had been miraculously conceived by a serpent. A site in Turkey had discovered an inscription that dates to 9BC, which hails Augustus as a god, whose birthday signaled good news for the world.
    - Many archeological inscriptions refer to him as a god, or the son of a god, and associate him with peace, hope, and good news.
  - Caesar Augustus implemented a census (v.1-2) which required that all adults in the Roman Empire return to their town of birth for paying taxes. The irony is that only God legitimately counts his people (Num. 1; 26). Caesar did not ultimately summon Joseph with his wife, Mary, to Bethlehem. God did. The Scripture must be fulfilled (Micah 5:2). Even though Caesar Augustus was unaware of it (Isa. 10:7), he furthers God’s agenda.
  - Mary accompanies Joseph 80 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. We do not know how long they stayed until Mary gave birth. Presumably, Mary would be nine months pregnant (although there is no indication).
- 2. God is accessible to all through His Son, not Caesar (v.6-7)**
  - “While they were there (in Bethlehem), Mary gave birth to her firstborn son” (v.7).
  - Location:
    - Many translations render the location of the birth of her son at an “inn.” The Greek word is *katalumati* which instead should be translated as “guest room.”
    - The typical layout for the first-century Palestinian dwelling was a rectangle divided into three sections: a large central room, a guest room (visitors), and a room for the animals. A full-wall or half-wall separated each room, and all had their separate entrances.
    - There was no guest room available in the home, so Mary delivered the baby in the space designated for the animals (if there were animals present). Interestingly, Luke does not mention animals. The *katalumati* is translated as “upper room” (Luke 22:11). If Luke intended an “inn,” he would have chosen *pandocheion* (Luke 10:34).
    - Often, residential homes would be constructed perpendicular to hills and caves or even built into them (as Bethlehem is 2300 feet above sea level).

- Conditions:
  - The child’s wrapping in cloths was an ancient Jewish custom (Ez. 16:4) and is still practiced today. While we are not informed whom they stayed with, nor how long, we do know that God incarnate was born in a room that had a stench of manure and urine from domesticated animals.
  - Instead of being born in a palace, God in the flesh is birthed as a pauper. The main sign for the visiting shepherds is where he was placed: in a feeding trough constructed from stone, brick, or wood.
  - Luke mentions that he is the firstborn (of another sibling), not an only child. If Luke wanted to teach Mary’s perpetual virginity, he would have chosen a different Greek word (*monogenes*). Luke also alludes to God’s firstborn Israel (Ex. 4:22): Christ will be faithful Israel.
  - God incarnate is placed in the manger and available to shepherds.

### 3. God is the object of worship in heaven, not Caesar (v.8-14)

- Shepherds were known to prey on lonely travelers and were suspects in robberies. Their prolonged absence from society combined with their ill reputation forfeited them from being witnesses in a court: shepherds were not permitted to be eyewitnesses in court. Shepherds were placed alongside tax collectors and gamblers and were outranked in societal scorn by lepers.
- Most likely, since the shepherds stayed “in the same region” of Bethlehem, it was the winter months (November-March). However, a census was typically after the spring and summer harvests (July-August).
- An angel of the Lord visited these shepherds. The “glory” of the Lord shone around them. This “glory” refers to weight, splendor, or light. This is to contrast the time of day: night. Light is shining in the darkness.
- The City of David primarily refers to Bethlehem (1 Sam. 17:12-15) and Jerusalem, where the ark and the temple are. Bethlehem is the birth of the Messiah, while Jerusalem is where the kings have been coronated and even buried (as Bethlehem and Jerusalem are five miles away from one another).
- The angel “pulls back the curtain” of God’s heavenly host rejoicing in the birth of this Son. Christ (Messiah/Anointed One), Lord (sovereign authority), and Savior (Deliverer) are all attributed to this Son.
- The shepherds respond by saying to one another: “let us seek this thing out...” (v.15).

### 4. God ultimately brings peace, not Caesar (v.15-20)

- The only sign (1:18, 34-35) that the shepherds received was this baby wrapped in ordinary cloths but laying in a feeding trough. Presumably, the shepherds scoured the town in search of this child.
- When they arrived, they did not worship Mary or Joseph. Instead, they honored this Son by informing Mary and Joseph of what occurred while tending their sheep. Mary has pondered not only Gabriel’s message but also the eye-witness account of the shepherds (1:29; 2:19).
- These shepherds believed and became the first evangelists and converts. This will foreshadow the mission of the Son of God: as the Dawning One (1:78-79), he draws men who live in spiritual darkness to Himself. While shepherds were disqualified from serving as legal witnesses, they are qualified by God to witness all they have seen and heard (v.17-18).