

About the Story

Jesus Is Born (Luke 2:1-7)

The Setting of the Story

A story's setting has to do with when and where the story takes place. Sometimes we are told specifics about a story's setting, and sometimes not. Luke's story of the birth of Jesus begins with significant details about the setting—first about when he was born and then about where he was born. Luke doesn't give a date, but he tells who was ruling the nation and what was going on in the world. Then he names the region and town where Jesus was born.

Caesar Augustus

“Caesar” was a family name. It became a title for the supreme ruler of the Roman empire when Julius Caesar conquered all the lands around the Mediterranean Sea. After Julius was assassinated, Gaius Octavius took power and ruled Rome for 45 years. He became known as Caesar Augustus, which means “revered.” Sometimes he is referred to as Emperor Augustus.

Enrollment

Jesus' people had been conquered by Rome and at the time of Jesus' birth were dominated by Roman rulers like Augustus and Quirinius. Augustus was the emperor and Quirinius ruled under him as the governor of Syria. In those days, Syria included Judea and Galilee, the homelands of Jesus' people. The people were oppressed by Rome in many ways, including having to pay taxes that did not benefit them at all. Making people “enroll” was a way of getting them to register for paying taxes. Men had to go to their ancestral home to be enrolled. So Joseph went to Bethlehem.

Nazareth and Bethlehem

Nazareth and Bethlehem were both towns. Nazareth was up north in the region of Galilee and was not very big or important. Bethlehem was in the region of Judea, close to Jerusalem, which was the most important city for Jesus' people. Bethlehem was small, but had a noble history because it was the home of David—the greatest hero of Jesus' people. King David was an ancestor of Joseph.

An Untimely Birth

Joseph and Mary were engaged, but had not yet been married in a wedding and had not lived together. So it was a scandal that Mary was pregnant. Nevertheless, Joseph stayed with her and took her with him to Bethlehem. When her labor began they had no home or lodging for safety and comfort. The best they could find was some kind of shelter for domestic animals. Mary laid her newborn baby in a feedbox, and wrapped him in bands of cloth so he would feel secure and stay warm.

Connections

Below are connections to the story that we might make when we listen to it in light of our own life experience.

A prayer suggestion:

1. Tell the story to yourself, picturing it in your mind's eye.
2. Reflect on these possible connections to your life.
3. Then consider if there is something you want to say to God in response.
4. Listen for what God might be saying to you through the story.

- ❖ This story sets the birth of Jesus in the context of world events. So the story invites you to think about what was going on in the nation or world when you were born.
- ❖ Mary was betrothed, but not married, when she gave birth to Jesus. So the story might be inviting you to consider someone else you know who was an unwed mother.
- ❖ Mary laid her infant son in a manger. Do you know what your first bed was like? Or your children's?

There may be another connection you make with this story. You could write that down here, or just hold it in your heart, and offer it to God.