

**Observations on the Arrival of a Firstborn King**  
**Sermon on Luke 2:1-7**  
**December 25, 2007**  
**Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI**  
**Pastor Karl Walther**

*Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you! He is Christ the Lord!*  
Amen.

God's special Word to us on this Festival of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ is the Christmas Gospel itself: the record of the birth of our Savior—in Luke chapter two, verses one through seven:

*In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.*

*So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.*

*While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*

This is God's Spirit-inspired Word of our newly born Savior Jesus Christ.

### **Introduction: Observations on the Arrival of Our Firstborn King**

Dear fellow Christians—filled with joy at the birth of your Savior:

The story of Christmas is absolutely charming, isn't it? A young couple, under the decree of a powerful king, is compelled to take a long journey. They're expecting a child, but danger looms when the baby is about to arrive, and they have no place to have the baby. Fortunately, just in time, they find a place among the cattle and other farm animals, and the sweet little boy is born.

What a charming story! It tugs at our hearts. And it's meant to do so. The Holy Spirit is persuading our souls to place our faith in this baby. Furthermore, the more a person studies the story, the richer in meaning it becomes. So, let's take another and even closer look at God's Word to us today. Let's make three: OBSERVATIONS ON THE ARRIVAL OF OUR FIRSTBORN KING.

### **Part One: Jesus' Birth Is Historical Fact**

God's Holy Word to us today begins this way: *In those days* – the Evangelist Luke is writing some sixty years after the fact – *Caesar Augustus* – the Roman emperor of much of the world; he ruled from the mid-forties BC to the year four BC – *he issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world*. The *census* was for the purpose of taxation. The Caesar wanted to know how much money he could demand from the various territories, given their population. The census of *entire Roman world* meant that people in the entire arc from Spain through Italy through Greece through Israel through Egypt would have to do a considerable amount of traveling.

Now: *(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)* And *Syria* was the district to which the land of Israel belonged. *And everyone went to his own town to register*—a fairly orderly way to carry out a numbering of the peoples; but can you imagine having to up and travel across country to your own native town, if you weren't still living there?

And so it was that: *Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, ... to register with Mary.*

And that's the first part of the Christmas story. Now, what to make of it? Well, probably chiefly, it's obvious: This is actual, factual history. This stuff really happened.

I mean: *Caesar Augustus, Quirinius*, and *Joseph and Mary* – and Jesus, too! – these are people who really existed. Taxation and travel—it really happened. *Rome and Syria, Galilee and Judea, Nazareth and Bethlehem*—those are real places that, to this day, you can really go and visit.

See, Luke doesn't start his account by saying, "Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, an unnamed monarch commanded his unnamed subjects to do unnamed things." No! In contrast to the false accounts of every other religion in the world, this is actual, factual history.

And if you were inclined to doubt Saint Luke on the issue, you'd have trouble with a lot more witnesses, because nearly every detail in Jesus' life is corroborated by the testimony of many other men. Because of those many historical witnesses: to deny Jesus you'd have to deny history—everything that ever occurred before your birth, which you didn't see with your own eyes or hear with your own ears. But what a fool you'd have to be! You couldn't even explain how the things that are ever got to be.

So, our First Observation on the Arrival of Our Firstborn King is this: **Jesus' Birth Is Historical Fact.**

## **Part Two: Jesus' Birth Fulfills God's Promise**

Now, let's go on: ***So Joseph*** – Jesus' stepfather, of course, and humanly speaking the guardian of the Christ child – ***Joseph also went up*** – in elevation, down the map – ***from the town of Nazareth in Galilee*** – the Israeli district to the north – ***to Judea*** – the Israeli district to the south – ***to Bethlehem*** – five miles south of Jerusalem.

Now: *Bethlehem* was ***the town of David*** – where that great king was born and grew up – ***because Joseph belonged to the house and line of David*** – as did Mary, for that matter. ***Joseph went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him*** – they were engaged, but not united physically – and Mary ***was expecting a child*** – whose actual Father was, of course, God himself.

So, that's the second part of the Christmas story. And what to make of it? Well, consider this question.... Why? Why the bother? Why the better part of one week's journey, a hundred hard miles without wheels? Why did God put poor Joseph and especially poor – pregnant! – Mary through all of this? Well, God had to do it – didn't he? – because of his promises!

God had promised that our King would be born in Bethlehem. Micah chapter five, verse two: *But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.*

Furthermore, God had promised our King would come from the descendants of David. In Second Samuel chapter seven, verse sixteen, God promises David: *Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.*

And so, God fulfilled those promises by having David's descendant Joseph and David's descendant Mary make the trip to Bethlehem for the birth of the Christ child. It takes a real God to do something like that. Only the true God can promise something seven hundred years ahead of time (through Micah) or a thousand years ahead of time (to David) or for that matter four thousand years ahead of time (to Adam and Eve) and then – as the eternal God – fulfill all of it later. See, this is the real Lord of all operating here!

And this true God of the Holy Scriptures will – obviously! – fulfill his every promise to you: in the same way he did here, in the person of Jesus Christ. God promises, “You are right in my sight, completely acceptable to me,” and God has fulfilled that promise to you: in Jesus Christ. God promises, “I insist on forgetting every transgression you have ever committed,” and God has fulfilled that promise to you: in Jesus Christ. God promises, “Eternal life with me in glory now belongs to you,” God promises, “Not only that, I personally will walk with you throughout your life, kicking many obstacles out of your path, and helping you leap over other obstacles,” and God has fulfilled all those promises to you: in Jesus Christ.

That’s our Second Observation on the Arrival of Our Firstborn King at Christmas: Jesus’ Birth Fulfills God’s Promise.

### **Part Three: Jesus’ Birth Has Him Sharing Our Poverty**

And finally, we read: *While* Mary and Joseph *were there* in Bethlehem, *the time came for the baby to be born, and Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son.* So, Jesus was the *firstborn*—and that’s significant. First, it reminds us that Mary would later have other-born, too: children with Joseph. Second, in those days the *firstborn* like Jesus would be the specially designated heir with special responsibilities over against the other children. Third, Jesus wasn’t just Mary’s *firstborn*. He was God’s *firstborn*, and only natural born Son. Although Jesus had existed eternally in the past, as God’s Son he had a son-to-father relationship with God the Father, which is reflected here.

And then: Mary *wrapped* her child *in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn*, even just in a corner of the guest room.... And so it is that manger scenes depict the Christ child in soft strips of cloth, on a bed of hay, in a barn (which probably may have been the opening of a cave), with cattle and Mary and Joseph and others looking on.

It’s a charming story, isn’t it? But think of what we just read! *While they were there, the time came for God to be born, and Mary gave birth to God, in the flesh. She wrapped God incarnate in cloths and placed God in a manger, because there was no room for God in the inn.*

You know, it tugs at our hearts when people who are well off do something nice, completely uncompelled, for others who are poorly off—and we honor people like that. The president takes hours off to visit and comfort citizens who are injured. A star athlete does the same, and pays their bills. Healthy people volunteer time, donate blood, even offer a kidney to those who are hurting, diseased, or sick. Maybe you’ve even been the recipient of such kindness sometimes. But in the Christmas story, there’s so much more!

God develops in a virgin’s womb. God is delivered through painful childbirth. God enters a cold world. And God does it because when all of this happened to us, we botched it; we arrived very sinful from birth.

God arrives where there is no room for him—no mansion, which would befit him, no spacious residence, no modest home, no cabin, no shack, not even a corner of a guest room. And God does it to deliver us into a spacious, glorious residence within his Father’s mansion in paradise.

God is wrapped in cloths—no fitted clothes, no onesies, no whole-suit jammies, no luvs or pampers. And God does it to wrap us in the warm embrace of his luxurious love, to clothe us in his radiant righteousness which will never wear out on us.

God himself is born into a manger for us. And we sing, “Away in a manger, no crib for his bed”, and we think, “Ah, what a sweet soft bed there was for the little Lord Jesus’ head.” But folks, the manger into which Jesus was born was a cattle feed box!

So, we come to this conclusion: God, who existed in perfect bliss in all eternity before time began, God, who by his almighty Word created out of nothing the entire cosmos, and all its innumerable constituent parts, including many thousands of galaxies—that almighty, eternal God left his throne in heaven, where he was surrounded by countless holy angels rendering to him their praise, and he was born without room and without clothes into a sloppy cattle feeding trough, where the bulls and the cows get their food. He did it fully to feed you with his forgiveness—and to deliver to you a delicious everlasting banquet of blessings: which are so glorious that you and I could never imagine them even in a million years!

Wow! That's what you and I are celebrating this Christmas Day, and every day, and for an eternity of days!!! Shout it from the rooftops! and on every street corner! Christ our Savior is born!!! Amen.

*Glory to God in the highest! And on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests!*  
Amen.